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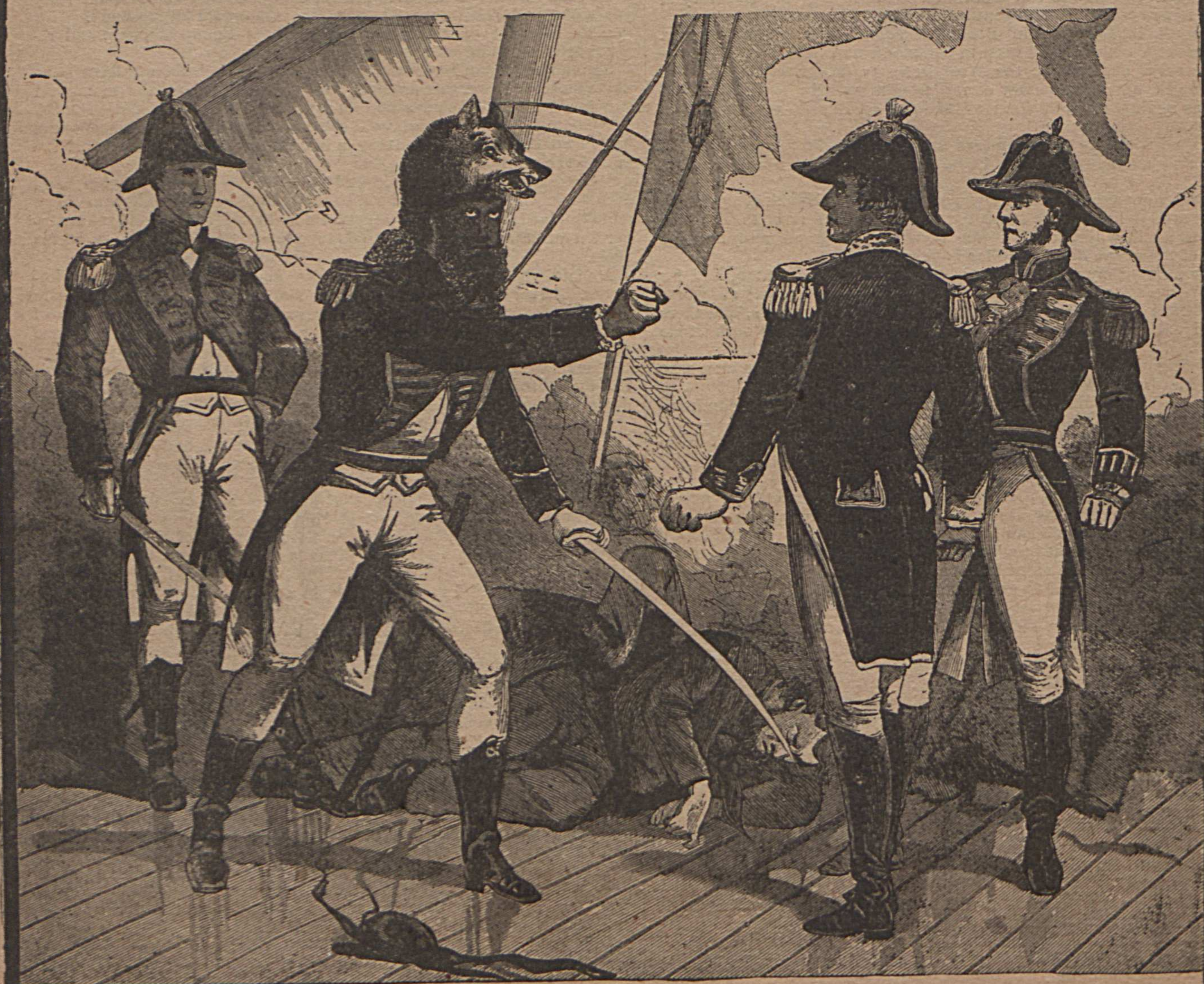
No. 1131. { COMPLETE. } FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 34 & 36 NORTH MOORE STREET, N. Y. { PRICE } Vol. II.
NEW YORK, July 23, 1892. { 5 CENTS. } ISSUED WEEKLY.

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The Ocean Wolf. *

A STORY OF PRIVATEERING
IN 1812.

By GEORGE G. SMALL.



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THE OCEAN WOLF.

A STORY OF PRIVATEERING IN 1812.

By GEORGE G. SMALL,

Author of "Young Capt. Perry, the Hero of 1812," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

A CURIOUS ADVENTURE.

THE following story is taken from the private log of Frank Winthrop, relating to the sensational incidents of his career while first officer of the American privateer Firefiend, commanded by Captain George Hilton, the Ocean Wolf, as he used to be called in those days, the mystery surrounding whose career has never been cleared up. He was a remarkable man and a terrible fighter, as the history of privateering during the war of 1812 most unmistakably shows, and the glimpses we get of him in his narrative shows us once more that truth is stranger than fiction in its wildest flights.

This log is a highly prized heirloom in the Winthrop family of New England, and the author of this once had the pleasure of reading it, which convinced him that such deeds of daring and patriotism should be published to the world.

I commence nearly at the beginning of the log, giving the story as though it was being told by Winthrop himself.

In June 1813, I landed in Boston, a complete wreck financially. Three months before I had been in command and half owner of the brig Franklin, engaged in the West India trade. Every cent I had in the world, and some money of my friends, was in the brig. But luck was against me, and she was taken by an English cruiser and all was lost.

I escaped with one of my officers and several of my crew from the cruiser and managed to reach Boston in the condition before mentioned.

Naturally enough I made my way down toward the shipping, for by it I had always lived since I was ten years old, and now that I was penniless again why should I not turn to the broad and heaving bosom of the ocean once more for help and succor?

While making my way along Ann street, which was then, and for many years afterward, a great resort for sailors, as well as worse characters, I noticed a crowd before one of the low taverns, and there was evidently much excitement among the mixed masses both inside and out.

Crowding up as near to the door as I could, I asked a man who was in front of me what the trouble was.

"That I don't know exactly," said he, "but from what I can learn there is some sort of mischief going on in there."

"Yes," said another, "they brought a beautiful young lady here in a carriage, but the driver somehow got frightened and cleared out."

"Who is the young lady?" I asked.

"Hang me if I know, but there seems to be something wrong somehow, for they say she has fainted dead away," replied the man.

"The reason the coachman left so suddenly, was because the crowd began to throw bricks at him," another of the spectators volunteered.

The more I heard the more I became interested. Elbowing my way along, I finally managed to get near the door, where I asked for more information.

"Do you see that man standing there in the door at the foot of the stairs?" a sailor asked me.

"Yes, what of him?"

"Well, that is Andy Craig."

"What, the fellow in the pay of the English government?"

"I've heard say he war that, or a spy, or something to do with 'em."

"And what is he doing here—and what is the crowd about?" I asked eagerly, for I knew this Craig by reputation, and felt sure that he indirectly owed me the little fortune I had been stripped of.

"Wal, as near as I can find out, he was in a carriage with another man and a girl, and somebody heard the girl cry for help, and a crowd started after the carriage. The driver whipped up his horses, but one of them fell somewhere about here, and they brought the fainting girl in here."

"I'll bet there's mischief in it if Andy Craig has got anything to do with it," said I, loud enough for everybody to hear.

"Ay—ay!" cried half a dozen voices.

"Let's take the girl away from him and find out what business he has with her!" I shouted.

"Yes, yes, let's!"

"You had better mind your own business, or it will be worse for you," said Craig, pointing to me.

Reckless as I was, and having the feeling I did against this man, I cared not what I did. Could I have killed him, it would not have hurt my feelings much.

"How many friends has he?" I asked.

"There appears to be about a dozen of them, and all English."

"How many will volunteer to take the lady from them, and, if she has been wronged, right her?" I asked.

"But they are well armed, and hold the head of the stairs."

"What of it? Who will follow me?"

Not a soul volunteered.

"Are you Americans?" I demanded, after waiting a moment and receiving no reply.

"Wall, we don't want our heads shot off, whatever we are," growled one, at which the others laughed as though that excused them.

At that instant a powerful, dark-complexioned man, about forty years of age, forced his way toward me, the crowd falling back.

"Messmate, I am with you," said he, handing me a pistol and reserving one for himself.

So maddened had I become by this time that I should have gone alone had not this stranger come to my assistance, but the moment I saw him I felt that I had a lion on my side.

"Thanks; come on and we'll clean out that nest of Britishers in a half of no time," said I, making a bound for Craig, who stood at the foot of the stairs.

He attempted to shoot me, but I knocked the pistol from his hand and seizing him, I hurled him into the crowd, who, seeing him down and disarmed, commenced to kick him as he deserved, while my stranger friend flew up the stairs, two steps at a time, and I close at his heels.

A pistol shot rang through the house, and then another quickly followed. I reached the room where the shots were fired just in time to see the stranger in the act of throwing a man bodily through one of the chamber windows, while one lay wounded on the floor and two others were about jumping from another window.

A man sprang from behind a door and came for me with a sword. The bullet from my pistol shattered his sword arm, and seizing him, I flung him upon the floor and placed my foot on him.

The battle was won thus quickly, and we turned our attention to the young lady who had occasioned the trouble, and found that she had recovered from her faint and had fled into a bedroom adjoining the chamber.

The door was not fastened, but she was holding it with all her might, evidently fearing further outrage.

"Let us in, please," said I, in a friendly tone of voice, while my mysterious companion took my place with his foot on the man I had thrown.

"Who are you?" I heard her ask, in a voice full of terror and suspicion.

"Friends at all events. You shall have protection if you need it. Please open the door."

"But those men—"

"They are powerless now."

"Guess you think so, don't you?" I heard my friend ask of the man whom he held down.

"Curse you. I surrender—let me up," said the man.

"One moment, please," was the chilling reply.

Meantime the bedroom door had been opened a few inches and a frightened, beautiful face, looked out upon me.

"Were you in danger?" I asked. But she did not appear to understand my question, so dazed was she. "Were you brought here against your will?"

"Yes, yes—where are those men?" she asked, throwing open the door still further.

"There are two of them," I replied, pointing to the two wounded ruffians upon the floor. "The others have escaped, and you are safe."

"Oh, take me from this place and let me go home. They took me from the street and placed me in a carriage, and I—I forget the rest."

"Ah! a case of abduction, eh? Where is a constable?" the myster-

ious stranger asked of those who had by this time crowded up the narrow stairway.

"Somebody has gone for one."

"And where is Andy Craig?" I asked.

"He has escaped, more dead than alive."

While he was speaking a constable forced his way up-stairs into the room.

The situation was quickly explained to him, when he turned and asked the young lady's name.

"Adelaide Crocker," she replied, giving her address.

"I used to know your father well. What was the object of this attempted abduction?"

"I have no idea, sir; I was walking alone when a carriage drove up to the curb, and before I knew it I was seized and placed in it."

"How strange—what an outrage!" said the constable.

"Not so very strange," replied my friend, for such I shall continue to call him. "Her father owns and has fitted out several privateers. Indeed, he is away cruising on one now. Craig and these other rascals are British spies, and they thought to strike the brave old man between wind and water by abducting his daughter and holding her as a hostage."

"Yes, that was so, curses upon the luck!" one of the wounded men growled in his pain.

"Take them away, officer, and pick up the rest of the scoundrels if you can," said I.

"That I will," said he, and getting the two wounded ones upon their feet, he led them down-stairs, followed by my friend, while I took Miss Crocker's hand and offered to escort her home, or at least to conduct her to a place of safety.

Reaching the bar-room, it was found that one more of the abductors had been captured by the crowd, but that Craig had managed to escape.

We forced our way through the excited crowd and out upon the sidewalk. I still held Miss Crocker's trembling hand in mine, and was about to lead her away when the stranger approached me.

"I like you, messmate; you're all oak and copper fastened. Can I see you here after you have conveyed this young lady home?" he asked, pleasantly.

"Certainly. I will meet you here in half an hour," I replied, for I was just as much in love with him as he could possibly have been with me.

CHAPTER II.

MY UNKNOWN FRIEND.

It was some time before Miss Crocker, the lovely girl whom I had rescued from the abductors and was escorting home, could speak. Indeed, it was not until we got out of Ann street and into an open and more respectable neighborhood that she became anything like herself.

She asked my name and station, and I told her frankly, as I did how I happened to be the means of rescuing her from her enemies.

I was not thinking of love or of beautiful women, I was thinking of the fortune I had lost: money I had been saving ever since I was a cabin boy, but I could not help thinking that I never had seen such a magnificent girl in all my travels as she was, and, crusty, hopeless bachelor though I was, I felt more than flattered by her kind words of appreciation for what I had done, and when I had finally left her at her mansion near the Common, and she gave me her hand and more thanks, and told me that she hoped to be able to repay me some day, I actually wished that I might have the same thing to do again for her sake.

But I was becoming sentimental and forgetting that I was a penniless sailor, and so, leaving her at home, I hurried back to the little tavern where I had left my mysterious friend.

More than half an hour had passed since I had left him, but he was there, seated at a table with a bottle of wine, waiting for me.

The crowd had mostly disappeared, although a dozen or twenty still lingered in the bar-room and were talking over the affair. They gave me a faint cheer as I entered, but I did not thank them for it, the cowards, as I felt them to be.

I went directly to the little table where my friend was seated. He frankly extended his hand, and invited me to sit down. I attempted to explain that the distance was further than I had expected, which accounted for my being a trifle late.

"Don't mention it. Have a glass of wine. Do you know I like you, messmate?" said he, frankly.

"Indeed, I am glad of that, for I feel toward you in very much the same way. Here's to your very good health; may you live long and prosper," said I, drinking the glass of wine he had poured out for me.

"Thanks; the same to you. You are a sailor?"

"And have been for twenty years."

"Have you a vessel?"

I laughed bitterly, and then told him why I had no ship, no money—nothing but a stout heart and body.

"My dear fellow, it is only the fortune of war. Square your yards, and make another tack," said he.

"I am ready, but in what direction?"

"How would you like to take a chance at privateering?" he asked, after looking around and at me a moment.

"I would like nothing better," said I, quickly.

"How would you like to sail under me?"

"I don't know you, but I like you. My name is Frank Winthrop," said I, to draw him out, for he had not told me yet who he was, or anything about himself, although I had told him all.

"And my name is George Hilton. Some people call me the Ocean Wolf," said he, quietly.

"Good God!" I exclaimed, for I had heard of him often. "You once commanded the Turk?"

"Yes, and did some good work with her. But she is all used up now, and I have been having a new schooner built over here in Chelsea, built of the very best, and paid for with English gold."

"Good!" I exclaimed.

"She is lying here at Commercial Wharf, and will be ready to sail on Monday morning. Now, if you would like to go with me as first mate and take your chances at mending your fortunes, you shall have the place. I want just such a man as you are for my first officer. Will you go?"

"With all my heart."

"Give me your hand on it."

We shook hands earnestly.

"I can afford to pay you a hundred dollars a month at all events, whether we take any prizes or not, for Johnny Bull has been very good to me by way of keeping my locker full; and after building the Firefiend, the stanchest and, I believe, the fastest vessel afloat, arming her with the best that money can buy, I have still a few shots left in the old Turk's locker yet. I have two good mates besides you, boatswains, and a crew of eighty men, as good and true as ever drew a cutlass or fired a gun. Nearly all of them have been with me before, and I have tried them many times."

"You couldn't offer me anything that would please me better, Captain Hilton."

"I believe it, for I see you like fighting. Have you anywhere to go now?"

"No. I have no home and no money. I lost everything with the Franklin."

"That suits me."

"Why so?" I asked, in some surprise.

"Come right on board the Firefiend and make yourself perfectly at home," said he, again offering his cordial hand.

"That will please me, captain."

"Have another glass of wine, and then I will take you down to see my beauty. I know you will like her, for she is the handsomest and stanchest thing afloat."

We drank our wine and started, but he graciously paid the landlord for breaking out the chamber window, by throwing the Englishman through it, after which we continued to Commercial Wharf, then the principal one in Boston.

While walking along I had a better opportunity to study the mysterious man; for everything about him had been, and I believe still is, a mystery. He was about forty years of age, weighing fully two hundred pounds, proportioned like a Hercules, and evidently quite as strong. His face was uncommonly severe in repose, though animated and pleasant enough when in conversation with those he liked. Broad-shouldered, deep-chested, full-bearded, black-haired, one could but feel themselves in the presence of a superior man when he was by them.

But a better description will be given of this wonderful man when in action. Let us hurry on to my future floating home, the Firefiend.

"There she lays," said he, turning to me as we reached the wharf. "Now tell me, Winthrop, is she not something to set a sailor's heart dancing?" and he spoke with as much enthusiasm as a lover might have used in speaking of his mistress. The very intensity of the man's voice startled me. "Here, here is where you catch her run. Do you notice the swell of her side, the beauty of that curve from the water's edge to the bulwark? Observe how she tapers aft, until it seems impossible that a gun could be trained through the stern port. She has no channels to drag through the water, you see. Those chain-plates, with the dead-eyes coming inboard, strengthen the bulwarks and are slippery things for boarders to grapple, while her beam gives a noble spread to the shrouds."

By this time we had reached and boarded the schooner, whose decks were lumbered by a crowd of men swinging bales of goods into her capacious hold; but by this time I saw that this man loved nothing but his beautiful vessel, every line of which he had originated, while every spar and all the standing rigging had been made under his eye.

The Firefiend was flush fore and aft, her main hatchway small, and I never saw such a roomy deck as she had. Her beam was twenty-six feet, and her length over all, one hundred and ten feet. She mounted a twenty-four-pounder on the forecastle, and there was ample room to work it. Both the height and thickness of her bulwarks was unusual, and I could scarcely see over them, and the gun-ports looked like embrasures in a fort. She carried eighteen-pounders, three on a side, and four forty-two-pounder carronades, as well as two twenty-four-pound chasers, making in all twelve guns, almost as formidable as anything in the American navy.

Her main-mast was eighty-five feet high, and the height from the deck to the top-mast head was nearly one hundred and fifty; and as I glanced aloft at her magnificent spars, with the square-rig forward, tapering into a little sky-sail yard, and studding-sail boom-irons as high as her top-gallant yard, I had no trouble in guessing the tremendous field of canvas she could show, if occasion required it. Her hull was painted a dark green, with a white streak going all around her just under the gun-ports. She sat quite low in the water. Indeed, all her firing was under water. But for her beam, her low free-board, I should have suspected that she would be very wet in a sea-way; but deep as she lay, her copper sheathing came a foot above the water-line and sparkled like gold in the setting sun.

"What do you think of her?" asked Captain Hilton, who had been watching me as my eyes ran over the salient points of his vessel.

"I think she's a perfect marvel, sir," said I.

"If she isn't we'll make her one before we let the stars and stripes go down on her. Now come and let me introduce you to my other officers," said he, leading the way to the cabin.

Here a formal introduction was had to the second and third mates, the surgeon, also to the boatswain, an old man who had sailed with Hilton before. They were a nice set of men—genuine Yankees; but I could see that they were a trifle surprised to find an entire stranger made first officer; but they evidently knew the man who commanded them, and had faith in him if not in me. This was my first impression.

After this I was shown through the quarter below decks, the cabins, and the quarters of the crew, who were to come aboard next day; and I shall always say, what after experience proved, that I never saw a stronger or more roomy vessel in my life than the *Firefiend* was. She was a marvel of beauty and convenience, and when I had finished inspecting her, I was as much in love with her as her owner and commander was.

This through with, I was shown to my cabin, and made as much at home as possible; and before everything was arranged, the steward announced the first meal on board the *Firefiend*, and we all gathered around the cabin table, where we ate, drank, made speeches, proposed toasts for the future, until we all seemed like old shipmates, four of us in one, bound for a certain object.

With the utmost delicacy, soon after dark, Captain Hilton took me ashore, and purchased for me a complete outfit, knowing that I had not the wherewithal to buy it myself, and when I retired that night to think over the events of the day, I could but deem that fortune had smiled upon me. But who could tell?

The next day the stores and ammunition were taken aboard, and all arrangements completed. The sailors got things straightened out and slicked before the men came on board that afternoon.

Yes, Captain Hilton is right, though I; for to judge from appearances he has a crew of men here who would scale the infernal regions if he told them to do so. I watched them as they came on board, after taking leave of their friends on the wharf, and I never saw a stouter lot of seeming dare-devils in the whole course of my life than they were.

And yet I noticed that the moment they set foot on deck they were highly disciplined, and instantly dropped all of their shore antics and behaved like men-of-war's men.

I was greatly interested in watching them, and to hear their expressions of admiration as they glanced over the vessel. Captain Hilton was there to greet them, and the first half hour on board was given to them to get acquainted with their new home and her magnificent armament. Thus far the only weak point that I had discovered in the captain, if indeed it was one, was his vanity over his schooner, and he smiled as none of them had ever seen him smile before as he listened to the extravagant praises which every Jack-tar of the crew bestowed upon the *Firefiend*, and I was beginning to think that he was too familiar with his men, when the boatswain's whistle, heard for the first time on board, sounded shrilly, and in an instant they gathered in the waist, where their bunks and quarters were assigned them and they were told off into messes.

Indeed, that was no green crew, I soon found out, although not being actually on duty just then, they were allowed more liberty than usual. And I afterward learned that every one of them, nearly, sailor-like, had spent at least the greater portion of a thousand dollars, which they had received as their share of the prize money in their last cruise on board of the *Turk*.

But here they were, ready to earn more, and what with their old confidence in the *Ocean Wolf*, as they delighted to call their captain, and the superiority of the new vessel, would they not be able to do?

Sunday night the officers spent together in the cabin in a social way. But Captain Hilton was not there, probably having business with the authorities, as his new letter of marque had only arrived from President Madison a day or two before. I spent the most of the time, however, listening to Dr. Campbell, the surgeon, and the wonderful stories he had to tell about Captain Hilton, he having been with him on the *Turk*, and I soon learned that he really merited the great reputation he possessed as a fighter.

Monday morning the tide served at eight o'clock, and by that time everything was in readiness. It was a very bright, hot day, and even at that early hour a crowd of people stood upon the wharf to see us off and to give us a parting cheer.

Captain Hilton stood on the quarter deck, and looked like a king as he gave every order connected with hauling out and getting up sail to catch the little breeze which went with the tide, and even in this I could see what a masterly seaman he was, and why it was that his men swore by him. He was a perfect ideal of an ocean buccaneer.

I noticed that our schooner attracted much attention as we slowly dropped down the harbor toward Governor's Island, for with her white flowing sheets and all her fore and aft canvas set, the *Firefiend* glided down the harbor like a swan. The eyes of the officers and men were constantly aloft, or looking over the bulwarks to see how the new vessel was behaving herself, although they all knew that this was no wind to take the lead out of her keels and show that she could do.

But I knew for privateering the best vessels were those which could sail fastest with the lightest wind, and so I watched her with some solicitude.

"How do you like her, Winthrop?" asked Captain Hilton, observing my close inspection of his pet.

"She behaves splendidly, sir."

"Oh, what can you expect with this breeze?"

"But we are coming up to Governor's Island very fast, and shall round it in a few minutes just as she is going now."

"Get the square canvas on her, and try her with that," said he, laughing.

I gave the order, and a number of men sprang into the fore shrouds, seemingly anxious to try the new clothes on her.

"Stand by to sheet home! Overhaul your clew lines!" I called, and in less than a couple of minutes all three sails were loosed, the sheets and halyards manned, and the canvas set.

The men worked without noise, and to the piping of the boatswain's mate. Nothing could be done quicker or nicer on board a line-of-battle ship.

"Get the square-sail on her, Mr. Winthrop, and let her have all three studding sails!" sang out the captain, who was as pleased as a boy with a new kite, and wanted to see the best she could do, even in the light morning breeze.

With these cloths set, we began to make the schooner show what was in her. We overtook and slipped by everything afloat, almost as though they had been buoys, and the happiness of her captain was scarcely less great than that of the men, who were watching and praising every movement, pronouncing her a perfect model and perfect in action.

Indeed, they were all pleased at her lively heels, for they knew the dangerous fun her captain would poke her into, and that in many cases not only their fortunes but their lives depended on her running powers.

We ran in this beautiful style until nearly three o'clock, nothing happening to turn our attention from the behavior of the schooner, that undoubtedly could outsail anything afloat, and by this time had left Boston harbor and her many islands far behind, and were now out upon the ocean, but whither bound none of us knew.

Before dark the watches were arranged, much after the merchant service fashion, and I found myself in charge of the port watch, with the third mate, Mr. Shannon, as my sub. The starboard watch went below, and I was in charge of the deck. The night was a beautiful moonlit one, and there was just wind enough to keel the schooner over a trifle, and put her nose right down into the waves, which broke in a smother of foam, and swept away on either side.

The silence and the beauty of the night were remarkable. Mr. Shannon paced the deck amidships; the lookout sat upon the "Long Tom" that frowned on the fore-castle, while the mates of his watch sat all around, silent as the night, while I stood on the quarter-deck near the man at the helm, when all at once I saw a flash of light away down in the east. I listened for any report that might follow it, but none came, and so I called the third mate's attention to it.

He looked in the direction I mentioned, suggesting at the same time that it was probably only sheet lightning, although the sky was so clear that the stars were visible down to the horizon almost, but while we gazed, we saw two more flashes in quick succession. We listened for a report, but none came. However, I concluded it was best to inform Captain Hilton of the fact.

He came on deck in less than a minute, and, taking the telescope from me, stood upon one of the broadside guns, and took a long look in the quarter where we had seen the flashes, but owing to the flood of moonlight on the water, it was hard to make out anything but a glaring ocean of silver.

"There are two vessels of some sort away down there in the east, but which way they are standing I can't make out. But if those flashes you saw were lightning, there would be more of them, so I suspect they were the flashes of guns. At all events I am going to find out about it if possible," said he, returning to where I stood.

"Put your helm over and let her go off a point. So. Mr. Winthrop, get the fore and after sheets eased off, and loose the square canvas," he added.

The watch sprang quickly to the work and noiselessly, and in a few moments, with the addition of the topsail and topmast studding-sail, we began to increase our speed greatly. The captain also ordered a man up on the topsail yard to keep a bright lookout.

But during the next hour nothing happened. Shannon was still pacing the deck and no report came from aloft. Presently he stopped and listened. Noticing this, I asked him what had attracted his attention.

"I thought I heard a voice calling for help," said he.

I at once went to where he stood and listened with him for as much as five minutes, but heard nothing.

"It might have been my fancy, but I am not often fooled by it," he mused; and just then the captain returned to the deck for another look to the eastward, and even then we heard the noise again, unmistakably a human voice somewhere near us, coming from the sea.

"Ah! the plot thickens!" said the captain, lowering his glass.

"There is some one hailing us, sir," shouted the lookout forward, and instantly the watch was up and listening.

"Topsail yard, there!" called the captain. "Do you see any sign of anything about?"

"No, sir; nothing either way," came the reply.

"Here, Shannon, take the glass and jump aloft and see if you can make out anything," but before he had got half way up the shrouds the "hillio" was repeated, this time somewhat fainter than before.

"I guess it must be somebody overboard, perhaps from one of those vessels," said the captain, pointing to them, as they were quite

visible since we had overhauled them so fast. "Keep a bright lookout all around. Call some hands aft to stand by the peak halyards and braces. Get your gaff-fore-sail brailed up, and swing the foreyards. Some hands aft here to man and lower away the cutter."

The helm was put down, and the schooner lay with her head close to the breeze, her headway arrested by her yards being aback, and everybody eagerly listening and watching for the call to be repeated.

Presently a lusty shout was heard close aboard: "Help, for God's sake; don't go past me!"

That settled the locality, and the cutter was quickly manned and lowered into the water, Shannon being in the stern sheets, two lusty fellows at the oars, and one in the bow on the lookout.

We heard them calling, and finally heard an answer, and could faintly see them pulling for some object only a few fathoms away on our port, and with a glass could see them lifting something out of the water into the boat.

"Have you got him?" called the captain.

"Yes, sir," replied Shannon.

"All right. Get all plain sail made again, Mr. Winthrop. Haul around those yards the moment the cutter is in the davits, for we must overhaul those fellows before they reach the Cape," and then he turned away to ascertain what the pick-up was.

CHAPTER III.

A CURIOUS PICK-UP AND A BATTLE.

THE boat's crew returned, and the boat was hoisted up in the stern davits.

The sailors leaped on board and then assisted the pick-up to do the same.

He was a tall, lank creature, of uncertain age and nationality, as a person could say looking at him in the moonlight, and to make him look even more ridiculous than a long bath with his clothes on had made him, he wore a huge cork life-preserver under his arms, large and buoyant enough to float two men.

He stood near the binnacle, dripping and looking curiously around, although he seemed perfectly fresh.

Captain Hilton approached him.

"Well, did you have a good soak?" he asked, looking into his comical face a moment.

"Say, got any rum aboard this 'ere scuner?" was the way he answered the captain's question.

We had picked up a genuine Yankee at all events.

"Yes. Steward, bring a cup of rum."

"That's what'll push this 'ere bilge water out on me," said the stranger, unstrapping his life-preserver with perfect coolness.

We were looking at him with some curiosity, expecting to hear him give some account of himself, but he never said a word until the rum had been brought and gulped down.

"Well, perhaps you can tell us now who you are and where you came from?" said the captain, after waiting a moment.

"Yes; my name's Jed Pickle, an' I hail from Yarmouth," said he, with a strong Yankee twang.

"Well, how came you adrift in this way?"

He took a long look around, as though trying to get his bearings. Finally he asked, pointing to the two vessels, whom we were now overhauling very fast: "See them?"

"Yes, what of them?"

"One on 'em's aarnation British armed brigantine, 'bout this size; the other's a scuner of a hundred tons, bound from New London to Boston, with a cargo of silks an' sugar."

"Well, what are they doing together?"

"Waal, I happen to be one of the crew 'of the Nancy, that's the scuner. We have taken several cargoes from New London that are brung there by big ships from the East an' West Indies, an' we didn't 'spect thar war any English cruisers in these parts just now, so we war just boomin' right 'long at the rate of ten knots, when this ere pesky varmint swooped right down on us."

"Well?"

"When we see her, we just up helm an' tried to get away from her, but there was no wind, an' he war usin' sweeps an' overhaulin' us fast. Our captain said as how it would be useless to fight him with our two broadside guns, but he thought as how he could fule him with a Yankee trick. So when he drew near an' hailed us, the cap'n replied as how we war English, but it didn't work, an' he let drive three guns at us, on' our skipper surrendered."

"That accounts for the flashes you saw," said Captain Hilton.

"Exactly," I replied.

"Waal, I'd no notion of bein' taken a prisoner, so I just strapped on that life preserver, an' quietly dropped overboard. That's the whole story from fust to last. What scuner's this?"

"We will show you presently," replied Hilton. "Take him below, steward, and give him a shift of dry clothes," he added, and then took up the telescope to look at the vessels ahead.

"The wind seems to be dying out," I observed.

"Yes, confound it; but if they haven't any more than we have, the Firefiend will get within range of them within an hour. But wind or no wind, we must recapture the Nancy, and take that audacious brigantine if it takes us a week to do it," replied he, resolutely.

We waited and watched, but in the course of half an hour a light breeze came down from the northeast, which freshened every moment.

"Ah! if this holds we shall soon have some fun," said Captain Hilton. "See the lanterns lighted, Mr. Winthrop; but keep them out of

sight, for Johnny Bull may not have discovered us yet; at all events we will take the benefit of the doubt."

I gave the orders, and the boatswain's pipe rang clear and shrill upon the wind that was by this time humming a merry tune aloft, and scurrying away with a booming note from under the foot of our huge mainsail. The men responded smartly, and I could see that they were delighted with the prospect of the fight that had been whispered among them. In a few minutes they were all at their stations, tampions out, boxes of canister and grape at the carronades, together with some star shot, of which the enemy stood so much in dread, and a gummet of round shot at every gun.

There was not, as might have been expected, the least confusion, and I afterwards learned that this was because the whole arrangements of the Firefiend corresponded almost exactly with those of the Turk, on which the men had served, and with wonderful promptness the whole crew got ready, and stood there waiting for anything that might come.

Jed Pickle came on deck in a dry suit of clothes, and looked anxiously around. The fact of our being an armed schooner and in pursuit of the Englishman seemed to please him greatly, as did the speed we were making.

"Good, by thunder!" he exclaimed, slapping his lank thigh. "Goldarn my buttons, go for 'em! But I never s'pected yu was that sort of a critter. Go it, butes, I'll hold yer slack! Gosh, but she's a clipper!" he added, looking over the sides at the foam that flew past us as we sped through the water.

Captain Hilton kept his glass pointed at the vessels. They had evidently discovered that we were enemies, for there was maneuvering on board, and in a short time the brigantine took a tack and stood away a few points as though anxious to get clear of her prize, so as to have fighting room.

We watched her closely, all the while coming up to her, and in about ten minutes the captain sang out: "There she goes around again! Ready—about ship! Stand by to fire the bow-chaser as she goes up and about."

There was a short pause as the helm was jammed over to leeward, and then, while the canvas rattled in the wind overhead, as though an angry dog was furiously shaking it, and every block rattled like huge dice boxes, a broad glare of light flashed upon the darkness, throwing up the figures of the men as they stood around the guns, followed by a heavy explosion, while the smoke of the gun whirled away to leeward and gleamed like a huge ball of cotton as it sped across the sea. This was the first gun ever fired on the Firefiend, and the men all gave a loud cheer in honor of it.

In a few minutes the sails were trimmed, and we were again after the Englishman.

"That will give them an idea of our metal if the ball dropped anywhere near them," said Captain Hilton, quietly.

"Ah! she tacks back!" I exclaimed, as a flash gleamed from her stern, but the shot must have gone wide of its mark, for we saw or heard nothing of it.

"Oh, that's Johnny Bull the world over." He never gives up without a fight. Now that he is drawing well away from his prize we shall soon have a chance to know his metal."

In a few minutes we yawed and gave her another pill from our bow gun, and then a third, as fast as the men could load. But it was too dark and the enemy too far away for us to see whether our shot struck her or not. We kept sending in our compliments, however, and they returned them without harming us, whether we harmed them or not.

But we were coming up so fast that we should soon be able to send in a broadside, and the men at the guns stood ready for the work.

In about fifteen minutes we had weathered on the brigantine so effectually as to have her dead on a line with our jib-boom, when suddenly Captain Hilton sang out for the starboard guns to give her a broadside.

"Aim low! I had rather the balls should go under than over her," and, with a motion of his hand directed the helm to be put down.

As the schooner came up in the wind the whole broadside was let fly with an explosion like a dozen thunderbolts falling on deck. In return we also received a broadside, the flash of which caused the brigantine to stand out like a specter in the surrounding darkness. But the balls all fell short save one that tore a hole in our jib.

"Give her another from the Long Tom as we go about! Starboard guns load with canister, grape, chain, and star shot for the next broadside, and aim for her rigging," said Hilton, and the bow gun answered promptly as we came about, so as to give her another broadside from the larboard guns.

The wind was freshening all the time and the Firefiend had all the canvas up that she could well carry. Indeed she lay over until the water was almost even with her lee gun ports, and the foam flashed like smoke over her fore-castle.

The larboard broadside did effective work, as we could see with our telescopes, nor must it be thought that the Englishman was idle, although it was quite evident that his metal was much lighter than ours. His shot fell thick and fast around us, doing but little harm, for I soon saw that one of Hilton's strong points was the maneuvering of his vessel so as to confuse the range of the gunners.

The starboard guns, with their dreadful charges of irregular shot, played the mischief with the sails and standing rigging of the brigantine, and while executing Hilton's orders I had a chance to see what sort of a man he was in action.

I had, of course, expected much of a man of his reputation, but I was not prepared to see such a change in him. He looked like quite

another man; indeed, it may be said that he resembled a fiend more than a human being.

He gave every order in a quick, ringing voice, slighted some of the guns, directed the gunners, and seemed to be in every part of the vessel at the same time. His flashing eyes took in everything, and his quick decision inspired all on board with his own pluck and indomitable will. He was fighting his new vessel, and seemed determined to find out her full capacity in the first contest.

The fight was now furious. Our shot had disabled the Englishman so that it was almost impossible for him to maneuver his vessel, but he was sullenly bringing all the guns he could to bear upon us with considerable effect. One of our brave fellows had been killed, and three more lay upon the surgeon's table below, severely wounded.

By this time we drew into such a position as to give her a raking broadside, and that settled the business, for before we could send in another, we heard a hail from the brigantine, announcing that they had surrendered.

"Cease firing, my hearties, the game is ours," said Captain Hilton in a voice full of exultation. "No. 1 boat's crew aft here, to man the cutter. Put the helm over and round her up into the wind! Haul around those square sails! Mr. Winthrop, go on board and take possession; send the boat back with your orders, and I will come on board directly. Send a shot from the fore-castle through the rigging of the schooner yonder, as a hint that she had better come about."

The gun was fired while I was getting the boat's crew into the cutter and being lowered away; but while rowing toward our prize I had an opportunity to observe that the schooner had taken the "hint."

On reaching the deck of the Englishman, the commander met me at the gangway, where he stood surrounded by his officers and several men bearing lanterns. He sullenly handed me his sword, and I called upon the crew to lay down their arms, which they did, quite as sullenly.

But what a sight that deck presented! There were at least twenty mangled corpses lying around, and the air was full of groans and lamentations that were truly heartrending, while a glance showed me how fearfully the vessel had been cut up during the engagement.

"What schooner is this?" I asked.

"The English privateer, Dart, six guns and seventy men and officers. To whom have I honor of surrendering?" asked the captain.

"To Captain Hilton, of the American privateer Firefiend," said I, promptly.

"Firefiend, indeed! She is rightly named, and the devil should be in command of a vessel that will use star shot. Look at my crew and my beautiful schooner!" said he, bitterly.

"Everything is fair in war, sir, but if you wish to discuss that subject you must do it with Captain Hilton. My business is to take command of this prize," said I, severely, for I could but remember that it was this same privateer that had captured my vessel with everything I had in the world, and I felt a genuine satisfaction in taking possession of her after having escaped from her prison hold.

"Is not this the same Hilton that once commanded that devil craft, The Turk?" asked the captain, after I had given the necessary orders for taking possession, and my men were driving the prisoners below.

"The very same."

"Ha! they call him the 'Ocean Wolf,' and in his new vessel he seems likely to maintain the unenviable reputation he has achieved," said he.

"He may have snapped at you before."

"Yes, but he did not get me."

"Well, sir, and I am the same captain that you captured with the brig Franklin not long ago, and from whom I afterward escaped. If everything is not fair in war, there certainly is some poetic justice in it," said I, bitterly.

He looked fixedly at me while he held up a lantern to my face, then turning away, he said:

"You Yankees are a bad lot."

CHAPTER IV.

THE OCEAN WOLF.

As soon as I had things well in hand I sent the cutter back to the Firefiend, with a report of what had been done, and a request for a surgeon and a dozen men.

By this time the vessels lay not more than a quarter of a mile apart, and the schooner that had lately been a prize to the Englishman not more than a mile to leeward, hove to and waiting for orders.

Captain Hilton returned in the cutter, and was the first to leap on the deck of the prize, slimy with human blood, and torn and splintered in the combat.

But I was astonished to see that he wore a short mask over his face, while the front of the cocked hat which he had worn during the action was surmounted by the head of a wolf. I could not understand it at first, although I remembered that the surgeon had told me that none of the prisoners that he had ever taken had seen his face, or anything more of him than the wolf's head, from which came the name of "Ocean Wolf."

"The Ocean Wolf himself!" said the English captain, addressing one of his officers.

"How do you like his teeth?" asked Hilton, overhearing the remark, and turning suddenly upon him.

"Sir, the wolf will one day meet the lion," was the captain's angry reply.

"I hope so. Secure all prisoners; throw the dead overboard, and take the wounded below. Dr. Lance, go below and assist. Clear up

the decks, and get to work doctoring the rigging," said he, and then he gave orders for the captain and his officers, with their private effects, to be taken aboard of the Firefiend.

It was nearly daylight before we had things in any kind of ship-shape. Indeed, the sails and running rigging of the prize were so badly cut up that much of it could not be mended until daylight came. But the decks were cleared of the ghastly evidences of the battle and thoroughly washed down before day came into the east.

It was my watch below, but the stirring events of the night had banished all thoughts of sleep, and so I continued on deck. Captain Hilton, on his return to the Firefiend with his prisoners, had taken another boat's crew, including our Yankee pick-up, Jed Pickle, and had gone over to the Nancy, taking possession of her and restoring her to her captain and crew, at the same time ordering him to keep the English prize crew as prisoners and deliver them to the authorities in Boston, and after this had been done, the schooner stood away and Hilton returned to the Dart, where I was at work.

He had no sleep any more than myself, but he didn't appear to need any, for he looked as fresh as though he had just turned out. Together we went over the prize, taking an account of what she contained and the number of prisoners, and by the time the sun was an hour high, we had sail made and had headed back for Boston harbor, preceded by the triumphant Firefiend, while the restored Nancy, with her valuable cargo, followed in our wake, being also a pretty fast sailor.

The action had taken place about ten miles to the eastward of Minot's Ledge Light-house, and the run back to Boston harbor took the better part of the day, Captain Hilton for some reason or other, resolving to deliver up his prisoners and his prizes in person.

The news of the battle and the brilliant victory of the Firefiend in her maiden engagement spread quickly, as did the romance of my connection with the affair, which was made a part of the story and published in all the papers. Indeed, I afterwards learned that my action in the engagement and in connection with the rescue of Adelaide Croker, where I first met Captain Hilton, had become known, and being published, I became quite a hero.

But Captain Hilton only remained in port long enough to transact his business, some of which was decidedly mysterious, and by daylight the next morning, the Firefiend, doctored of every wound she had received in the engagement, once more spread her broad white wings and stood out of the harbor, headed south-east, as before, and was again standing toward Cape Cod.

The morning was not what might be called a bright or promising one. The first few hours were all well enough, but about ten o'clock a fog began to rise, and before noon it was all around us thick as a feather bed, and blew in steam across our deck; in fact, it was all a blank to within three or four ship's lengths ahead of us. The green seas came curling and foaming out of the fog to windward, but you could not see a cable's length beyond the point at which their forms grew defined, and they went combing in curves as polished as oil to leeward, vanishing when they came to this horrible fog curtain.

The damp made the deck so slippery that it was difficult to keep one's footing. The moisture fell in showers from the rigging, and drops of water formed on my hat almost as fast as I could shake them off. The deck had been cleared, washed, and the rigging coiled down, and the schooner—in spite of the fog—had a comfortable air. And fortunately, we had a plenty of sea room.

Captain Hilton, however, was not inclined to regard the situation with complacency, although he knew every bucketful of water for twenty miles around. He was continually on deck, and keeping a nervous lookout all around. And to add to the mischief of the situation, the wind began to die out about three o'clock, when we were only a short distance from the scene of our action with the English privateer.

The sails hung almost straight, and the density of the fog seemed to increase as the wind died out. There was no noise aloft among the rigging, and the lookouts stationed in the fore and main tops were as silent as those below.

"I don't like this," said Hilton, turning to me, at the end of a long silence. "These fogs are fruitful of uncomfortable surprises, for as we lay now, an enemy's craft may bob out of this wool and be aboard of us before we could call to quarters. We must take care to see everything clear and keep our weather eye lifting. Besides, I have reason to believe that there is an English corvette hovering around the cape, for the captain of the Nancy told me that he had been chased by one only the day before he was captured by the Dart."

"A corvette?" I asked, in surprise.

"Yes. Why?"

"But if you should meet such a vessel, you surely would not think of engaging her?"

"I'll engage anything that wears canvas, if I can only see her in time, but this fog is what bothers me; I don't like to be pounced upon," saying which, he turned and went below, leaving me in charge of the deck.

To tell the truth, the idea of being in the possible vicinity of a big English corvette did not make me feel very happy, although I fully believed that Captain Hilton rather longed for a contest with a vessel larger than the Firefiend, just to put her and his crew to the test.

It was as calm as could be, and as thick as mud. In the course of half an hour Hilton came on deck again. Seeing how matters stood, he had the word passed along for the men to keep silence; also for no bells to be struck, and for the leadsman to speak his report in a low tone to a hand stationed by his side for the purpose of bringing his messages to the officer in charge.

In addition to this, the foresail was securely brailled up, and the stay-

sail and inner jib hauled down to silence their flapping, which was occasioned by the motion of the schooner on the swell, and under her mainsail and standing jib we glided slowly up and down over the breathing swell as silent as a morgue, and amid a fog as thick as a blanket. Indeed, for a part of the time the men forward could not be seen, or those on the lookout aloft.

I never heard such silence on board of a vessel in my life. Nothing broke it.

"Sh! what was that?" Hilton suddenly asked in a whisper, as he took the cigar from his mouth and stood in the attitude of an intense listener.

"What did you hear?" I asked softly, but none the less anxiously.

"Hush! there's a vessel near us! I heard the creaking of a block somewhere away from us just then. Pass the word for utter silence."

I went forward myself to give the order, which had the effect of trimming every eye and ear to its keenest stretch. Then I got upon a gun to give my ear a good hoist above the bulwarks, where I listened with all my senses.

All hands were poised in the attitude of listening, and so intense did our feelings become that we all felt certain—we could almost feel—that there was a vessel within a cable's length of us, evidently keeping just as quiet and for the same purpose that we were.

For ten minutes we listened, while the schooner silently worked upon the swell, and although none of us could swear that we heard anything, yet I would have sworn, on account of a something that I could feel, that we were very close upon a vessel of some kind.

All of a sudden we heard a pig squeal!

A grin overspread the faces of the men. I fancied the noise came from the starboard quarter, but Captain Hilton bent his ears towards the starboard bow. It certainly was comical to hear a pig squeal out on the ocean, and in such a dense fog, but the humor was made somewhat grim by the possibility that an enemy was close to us.

Once more, while we listened, did that pig squeal!

Captain Hilton approached me on tiptoe, holding up his hand to enjoin silence.

CHAPTER V.

A BATTLE IN THE FOG.

THE strain upon every one was visible, for we had been listening there in the thick fog for fully half an hour, feeling and believing that another vessel lay becalmed, like ourselves, in the fog, keeping silent, like ourselves, for fear they might drift upon an enemy, when the squealing of a pig not far away convinced us that we were close upon a vessel of some kind.

Captain Hilton approached me on tiptoe.

"Can you locate it?" he asked, in a whisper.

"It seems to me as though it came right out of the fog this way," I replied.

"And I am almost certain that it comes from an opposite direction. A sound in a fog I have always found to be uncertain. We haven't an inch of leeway," he added, looking over the rail.

"The suspense is dreadful."

"Worse than an open battle. Oh, for a little lift of this confounded veil, so that I could get a glimpse of her."

"And yet she may not be an enemy."

"But I have a feeling, a something I can't exactly define, that we really are close to an enemy. I never have these feelings unless there is something wrong," and then he beckoned to the second officer, Mr. Bowler. "How do you make it out, Tom?"

"I should say, sir, that it came from starboard," replied bluff Tom Bowler.

"Well, we shall be obliged to wait, at all events, but pipe your ears at all points. I feel just like a fight, and if I could only get a sight of her I'd go for her if she was a seventy-four, and take advantage of this fog blanket," he added, turning away.

I smiled at Bowler, and with a look that asked if he really would do it, and he understood me.

"Do it! he'd fight three liners if they happened to corner him. Fear was out of date when George Hilton was born."

I watched in the direction I believed the sound came from, as did the others. The silence was so overpowering that it was painful, and I felt a strong desire to shout and break it.

Captain Hilton seemed more nervous than I had ever believed it possible for him to be, and in a few moments he approached me again.

"I think I see a sort of a darkness out yonder, sir," said I, pointing in my direction. "Look a little way to the left of the cutter's stern."

But as I spoke the fog closed in all around again as thick as the smoke of the broadside of a seventy-four, and all was lost again, and the captain shook his head.

Just then the man with the lead dropped it softly. I went to receive his report, and went back to tell Hilton that the soundings made twenty-two fathoms.

"How does she bear, Mr. Winthrop?"

"Southeast three quarters east, sir," I said, after going to the binnacle.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, as another noise, but a different one, greeted our ears. It was one that a sailor never mistakes—the sound of a coil of rope dropped from aloft upon the deck.

Hilton and I exchanged glances, and he at once appeared to have made up his mind, and going among the gunners, he gave them some orders in a whisper, and like ghosts they quickly set about getting their guns ready.

But so silently did they work that we who stood on the quarter-deck could not hear a sound. Both broadsides and the bow and stern guns were quickly and silently loaded.

This had scarcely been accomplished when there came a rift in the fog, a channel caused by a flaw of wind, which gave us a momentary glimpse of the stern, mainsail, spars and flag of what was evidently a corvette, while the flag told unquestionably that she was English.

It was only a momentary glimpse that we got, and they probably did not see us at all before the fog again closed. But that momentary glimpse showed us that she lay becalmed like ourselves, with all sails set, not more than a hundred yards away.

Hilton flew to the gunners and directed the aims of the guns, and the next instant, at a motion from his hand, the enveloping mist flashed up all crimson, and, as though a mine had exploded on board, a heavy roar followed, breaking the silence with terrible effect.

The shouts, groans, yells and excited orders which we now heard convinced us that our shot had taken potent effect.

"Now, men, the silence is broken. Pull back the broadside guns and load them with chain and star shot, while you roll the other broadside into their places and give it to them again."

These orders were given and executed with marvelous quickness, but before the next broadside was fired the bow-chaser, that terrible Long Tom, sent a ball at the enemy which must have gone clear through her, close to the water line, and this was quickly followed by another broadside, the guns of which were slightly canted and raised so as to send their terrible messengers into the enemy's rigging.

Meantime the utmost confusion prevailed on board the corvette, and it was not until we had given them the second that she fired a broadside at us.

But it was a terrible one, and had we been in range it would have undoubtedly sent us to the bottom. As it was, our outer jib was riddled, evidently by the sternmost guns, which showed that the other shot had gone into space ahead of us.

"Give it to them again!" said Hilton, in a calm tone of voice, and once more we heard our grape and chain shot tearing along the invisible deck and the splintering and crashing of yards and masts aloft.

The fog was thick before, but the smoke of the guns now hung around us, completely hiding everything five yards away. Indeed, the flame-spouts of the enemy's next broadside did not glance the least reflection through the seemingly solid body of the smoke and vapor.

But it was evident that we were not moving ahead at all, for not one of their guns took effect. In fact, they seemed to go still farther ahead of us, showing that the enemy was either moving ahead, or the effect of our shots had knocked us around a few points.

I never saw such rapidly worked guns. The men were laughing as they worked, for a battle in the fog was a novelty to them, and they all knew that their shots were taking deadly effect. But the enemy fired rapidly, and occasionally their shots came uncomfortably near to us, though all too high to have harmed anything but our sails and rigging had they struck us, but the confusion on board of her was increasing, as we could plainly hear, and presently her guns were fired less often.

"Let 'em have it, hearties, for Englishmen are hogs and never know when they have got enough," said Hilton, and a loud laugh from all on board the *Freiend* accompanied the next broadside.

"Ship ahoy!" quickly followed it, coming from on board the *Englisman*.

"Hello! What do you want?" called Hilton.

"We surrender!"

"Oh, you do, eh? Who are you?"

"His Majesty's line of battle-ship the *Bellfontaine*."

"All right, I will board you presently," said Hilton. "Get a boat's crew into the pinnacle, armed to the teeth, Mr. Bowler. Mr. Winthrop, you may accompany me," he added, and turning away he hurried to his cabin.

The cheers of our men were deafening, and they cut up all sorts of antics about the decks, shook each other's hands, and made such demonstrations of delight as only a victorious ship's crew can make.

In a moment Hilton came on deck again, just as the boat's crew were stepping into the pinnacle, and I noticed that he had his mask and wolf's-head on as before.

"Mr. Bowler, see every gun loaded, and keep the men at quarters until you hear from me," said he, and then followed me into the pinnacle, which was speedily lowered into the water.

It was a wonder that he knew which way to head the boat, for what with the dreadful mist and the sulphurous smoke that settled down upon the face of the deep, and the stillness which followed the din and thunder of the cannonading, which had stunned every ear almost, seemed to leave everybody at sea, although Captain Hilton appeared to be perfectly at home, and to know just where to steer.

A dozen or fifteen strokes of the oars brought us so near the *Englisman* that we could see his black hull looming up and towering above us like some huge island.

Getting nearer, however, we saw that this big line-of-battle ship had been horribly cut up by our shot. Indeed, the carpenters were at work trying to plug three or four huge holes which threatened her quick destruction. While looking up through the smoke and fog to the standing rigging, the better portion of it was found not to be standing at all. It was broken, twisted, splintered, and hanging in tatters as far as the eye could see.

The ladder was let down as we approached, and no sooner did the boat come broadside to it than Captain Hilton caught on and began to climb up it.

I followed behind him closely, and the whole boat's crew came promptly up.

Captain Hilton leaped over the high bulwarks, down upon the deck, right into the midst of the officers who had congregated around, and, masked as he was, it was no wonder that he created a sensation.

"Who commands here?" were his first words.

"I did, but you do now," said the commander of the liner, presenting his sword in token of surrender. "But to whom do I surrender?"

"The American privateer *Firefiend*, owned and commanded by the *Ocean Wolf*," replied Captain Hilton, taking the sword, as his well-armed crew of twelve men came leaping over the bulwarks.

"Good God! the *Ocean Wolf*?"

"The same."

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK, THEN COMES THE TUG OF WAR.

We knew that our guns were double-shotted and the men at quarters, ready for any emergency; and the Englishmen appeared to know it as well, for there was no attempt at duplicity. The captain of the liner surrendered, as he had said he would; but both he and his officers appeared to be not only puzzled, but chagrined, at the thought of surrendering to a simple privateer.

But there was no help for it. The masked commander set resolutely to work to get his prisoners under the hatches, reserving a dozen or so of the sailors to assist his own men in doctoring and keeping afloat the magnificent prize.

The captain and his officers were grouped together amidships, waiting to see what their fate would be, and eagerly watching the movements of the masked and mysterious privateer, who was taking possession of the lately powerful war ship, but which was now dismantled and disabled almost.

The fog still hung between the two vessels, so that those on board of the American privateer could not see the big capture they had made, or those on board the liner see to what a comparatively insignificant vessel they had surrendered; but by an understood arrangement pistols were fired on both vessels at short intervals, so as to give indications of our bearings while the tantalizing fog continued.

When the prisoners had all been forced below the boatswain's mate was sent back in the pinnace to report the prize, and to bring back a surgeon to assist in taking care of the wounded, for so many of them were there that the five surgeons on the liner could not attend to them.

Indeed, I never saw, and never wish to, such a ghastly sight as the decks of this man-of-war presented. Our broadsides of grape and chain shot had raked her from stem to stern at least twice, and had played the havoc of war with her crew, while her hull had been so badly damaged by our larger balls, fired at such short range, that the pumps had to be kept going, while the carpenters were at work trying to stop the holes in order to keep her afloat.

It is almost impossible to describe the amount of damage that our short and fatal range had done to that leviathan of the sea, and while executing Captain Hilton's orders in repairing damages as best we could, I thought what must have been the *Firefiend's* fate had the Englishman managed to obtain our range as accurately as we did his.

Her foretop-mast was in halves, and her royal mast head had fallen upon the forecabin, killing and wounding several in the fall, and besides this her standing rigging was dreadfully mangled and her sails torn mostly into rags. Indeed, it did not seem possible that so much damage could have been done in so short a time.

This was the first and only naval engagement that I ever knew of that was fought in a fog so thick as to make both vessels entirely indistinguishable to each other. The English commander dwelt upon the unfairness of the thing bitterly, but he had to acknowledge that it was a chance of war, and although he would not admit it, he probably would have done the same thing had he been smart enough to catch us in the same way we caught him.

"Say no more about it, sir," said Hilton, who had been conversing with him. "Let the world decide whether I have acted wrong or not. You are my prisoner, as probably I should have been yours had you discovered me first," and with this he turned away, leaving him and the other disarmed officers under close guard upon the quarter deck.

They watched him as he went about giving orders. He was evidently more of a puzzle and mystery to them than he was to his own crew; but what his object was in going masked they, of course, could not make out no more than we could who sailed with him.

"Who is this *Ocean Wolf*?" asked the English captain, turning to the guard.

"Captain George Hilton," was the reply.

"Who and what is he?"

The sailor shook his head.

"Why does he wear that mask?"

The sailor shifted his quid and shrugged his shoulders significantly.

"Does he always wear it?"

"No; only in the presence of the enemy."

"He must be a strange fish."

"But he is a good one," replied the sailor.

"So is the shark, in his line of business. But I think he justly owns the title of *Ocean Wolf*."

"Yes; all Englishmen think so," was the laconic reply of the guard.

The conversation was cut short at this point by the approach of Captain Hilton, who ordered them to be taken on board the *Firefiend*,

he evidently being slightly suspicious of them, and in a few moments we had the big ship entirely to ourselves and under control, so far as the immediate danger of her sinking was concerned.

From one of the carpenters I learned that there were about fifty Americans on board as prisoners who had been taken from the sloop of war *Tantalus*, which had been captured by the Englishman only a few days before, and one of the first things I did was to find and liberate them. And the poor devils, how glad they were to breathe the air of freedom once more and to learn that they had been recaptured by Americans.

Captain Hilton on questioning them learned that the *Tantalus* had been captured after a short engagement, in which they had lost nearly one-half of the crew, and received heavy damage in the hull, owing to the immense superiority of the Englishman's weight of metal, and these men were at once put to work, gladly assisting in getting things into ship-shape.

It was nearly sunset, but during the last half hour the fog had thinned considerably and now began to lift, although it was yet as calm upon the face of the ocean as it is in a room. The two vessels were now visible to each other, and we were enabled to get our bearings. Captain Hilton was in excellent spirits and ordered an extra dram of rum served out to the men who had behaved so nobly in the invisible battle, and who had yelled themselves hoarse when the fog lifted and they saw the magnificent capture they had made.

And it is no wonder that they did cheer as they saw her, for when the fog lifted there she lay mirrored in the unruffled blue water, a thing of strength and beauty, indeed. She might well have been likened to a blind lion that had been overcome by a wakeful mouse, so great was the difference between the *Firefiend* and the *Bellfontaine*.

By this time we had got her jury-rigged forward, although there was enough hoist left in the stump of her foretopmast to allow of a double-reefed sail to be set, and before dark, by the aid of the liberated American prisoners, we had made quite a respectable figure of her aloft, where most of our shot had flown, and she was now in a fit condition for the short sail back to Boston, unless it came on to blow very hard.

The sea was beautifully blue, but still the air was perfectly motionless. Captain Hilton had returned to the *Firefiend* after seeing things gotten into ship-shape, leaving me in command of the prize, with Mr. Shannon, third officer of the *Firefiend*, as my first lieutenant, while the dozen men first brought from the schooner and the liberated prisoners made up quite a respectable crew, and one I thought I could depend upon.

As the sun went down a breeze sprang up from the north, but this did us little good; it being almost dead against us, since we were to shape our course back to Boston, Captain Hilton having determined to accompany her there.

Before dark he came on board again, and we had an understanding how to work during the night and the signals to be used. The prize was scarcely moved by the light breeze, although it was enough to send the *Firefiend* ahead at a splendid pace, and it was agreed that the schooner should lay off and on until daylight, so as to keep company, and then Hilton was to come on board again to give further orders.

Utterly worn out, I left Shannon in charge of the deck and went below for sleep. The cabins were simply magnificent, that of the captain being especially so, but not feeling wakeful enough to inspect them all, I turned in, and in spite of the sensations of the day and the situation running through my mind I soon fell fast asleep.

The wind being light all night, the two watches, composed of twenty-five men, had no difficulty in working the ship, and I was not called until three o'clock, when I found that the breeze had freshened a trifle. The *Firefiend*, with only her mainsail and main jib up, was about half a mile away to leeward, while the liner, with all sails up, was barely holding her own.

Rested and refreshed, I felt more like taking a closer look at the magnificent big prize that I was in command of, and I soon found her to be a first-class man-of-war, worth at least half a million of dollars, my share of which would more than cover the loss I had sustained at the hands of the government who had lately owned her.

At daylight Captain Hilton came on board, and the watch received him with a cheer. I told him what I had learned regarding the prize and her undoubted value, but it did not seem to elate him in the least.

"You did not get a look at her money locker, did you?" he asked, smiling.

"No," I replied, for I had not thought of it.

"Of course not, for I had the key. But, my hearty, that locker contains money enough to make us all rich, to say nothing of the value of the ship."

"Heavens! what a fortunate fog!" I exclaimed.

He smiled and went down to the cabin, where he remained for nearly half an hour. But on coming on deck again, I could not tell by his looks what he had discovered, or that he regarded the prize he had taken in any extraordinary degree remarkable, so calm was he.

"The breeze is freshening, and we shall have no trouble in getting back to Boston," he remarked, quietly, as he looked around.

"And what a sensation we shall create."

He smiled, without speaking a word.

Just then the quarter deck was hailed by the man on the topsail-yard.

"There is a sail on the port quarter, sir, about a couple of points abaft the beam."

We looked and sure enough there, about four or five miles away

from us, lay a large sloop-of-war, bearing right down upon us with all sail set to the favoring wind. Hilton seized a telescope and took a look at her.

"What is she?" I finally asked.

"She is an English sloop-of-war," said he, calmly.

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, and she shows from here ten gun-ports, all furnished."

"What will you do?"

He glanced at me as though I had asked the question foolishly, knowing what he would do.

"Why, fight her, of course, and capture her, if she don't capture us. Call your men to quarters, serve them an extra dram of grog, put them to a little practice with the guns and be ready to do your share of the fighting. When Greek meets Greek, they say, then comes the tug of war. Wait until I fire the first gun, and then run up the American flag and give her all you can send in of English iron. Maneuver so as to get her between us, and then show her what an English vessel, manned by Americans, can do against an English fighter. I will lead off with the schooner," saying which he went down the ladder into his boat alongside and was rowed back to the Firefiend.

CHAPTER VII.

A BLOODY ENGAGEMENT.

THE situation pleased me. For the first time in my life I was commander of a war ship, the liner Bellfontaine, which we had captured the day before in a fog, described in the preceding chapter, and in a position to inflict injury upon the enemy of the United States, and at the same time to pay back something on my own personal account.

There was not a flag flying on my vessel, although the star-spangled banner gleamed in the morning sun, as it floated proudly from the main gaff of the Firefiend.

The English sloop of war was bearing down upon us in a lordly way, evidently not knowing what to make of the prize I had command of, but ready for a fight with anything that bore the American or French flag, they being at war with both nations.

Captain Hilton was about a mile ahead of me, and I could see, while getting ready for action myself, that he was all ready, and quite as eager for the coming fray as the Englishman was.

I only had a crew of about sixty men all told, fifty of them being prisoners taken from the American privateer Tantalus, which the Bellfontaine had captured a few days before, and, as it required at least two hundred men to work the ship in any effective way, it will readily be seen that not much could be expected of me.

But it was evident that Captain Hilton did not expect me to do much more than to defend the prize, for he only sent me two additional gunners, and I understood that he intended to do nearly all of the fighting himself, being very fond of that sort of amusement.

Situated as I was, I at first had little else to do than to watch him.

The Englishman was reserving his fire, evidently intending to get near enough to crush the privateer with a single broadside.

Suddenly there was a huge puff of smoke from the fore-castle gun, and in a few seconds the report reached us, not, however, until the schooner had become hidden almost as the smoke spread and unfolded itself.

Still the Englishman crowded towards her without making any reply, and anxiety on board the Bellfontaine became most intense.

In less than another minute Hilton gave them another from his terrible fore-castle gun, and we sent up a tremendous cheer as we saw the enemy's bowsprit shot clean away.

Then with remarkable promptitude the privateer put her helm down and shot up into the wind, presenting her full broadside to the enemy, who was now wearing to come up on the port tack, and he gave her five guns, discharging them with remarkable precision.

We did not have to wait for the smoke to clear away before we could see what had been done, as they were obliged to on the schooner, for we saw the mizzen-royal-mast go down like a blade of grass before a scythe, and her main-topsail yard fall upon the cap, the halyards having been shot away.

In addition to this, we could see by the aid of our glasses that there were several large holes in her sails, especially her fore-topsail and mainsail, and that there appeared to be the greatest consternation on board.

This, however, did not prevent her from sending in her broadside, which she did in about half a moment, but it prevented her from taking aim so as to do any damage to the impudent Yankee, for a whole shower of shot fell at least a quarter of a mile away, doing her not the slightest harm.

Hilton's reply came promptly, and another broadside of star, chain and other small shot created perfect havoc among the enemy's rigging. Before that last discharge there were at least fifty men aloft repairing damages, but nearly every one of them had been killed and went down with the falling spars and general ruin.

But in spite of this John Bull evinced no disposition to draw out of the fight, and I must say that I never saw so badly a wounded ship handled so well, or handled at all in fact, for she finally contrived to get her broadside to the privateer, who was still sending in her fatal shot, and then the whole side of her black hull flashed into a blinding blaze of light that was terrible to see.

I held my breath, expecting to see the schooner's spars swept away. It was not so, although I could see that several ugly holes had been made in her sails.

How eagerly I watched for the signal Hilton had agreed to give me

when he wanted me to join in the fight, for I was now in a good position to do so, but it came not.

Broadside followed broadside, and both of the vessels were now so completely enveloped in sulphurous folds of smoke that I could get only an occasional sight at them, which made me all the more anxious about the signal, fearing I might not see it.

Presently I heard a loud cheer from the Englishman, and looking, I saw that the American flag had been shot away.

But I presently saw Hilton spring upon the bulwarks and wave a smaller ensign which he had held upon his sword, while some men were reefing new flag balyards.

That cheer was of short duration, for almost instantly the crew of the Firefiend answered it with another as they saw their captain, and accompanied it with a broadside.

The next instant Hilton saw that I was in position to send in a broadside, and he gave me the signal.

My men stood at quarters with guns all loaded.

"Port broadside—ready! Take good aim and hull her with every ball!" I cried.

The men gave a cheer, and so nearly together were the guns fired that it seemed to be one tremendous explosion.

"Load again quickly and gave her another dose!" I cried, and then sprang on to the weather bulwarks to see if I could penetrate the smoke sufficiently to learn the effect of the broadside.

The Englishman was now lying almost between the Bellfontaine and the Firefiend.

She was evidently paralyzed for a moment by the unexpected broadside, for although she must have known that the Bellfontaine was a prize and undoubtedly in charge of simply a prize crew, she was unprepared to receive a broadside of such vigor, if, indeed, any at all.

And as the smoke cleared away I could see several carpenters being lowered over the side to plug holes, which convinced me that some at least of my shots had done good service. As quickly as possible I ran to the men at the guns.

"Bravo, my hearties, you have set them to plugging. Give them some more work of the same sort," said I, and with another cheer they sent in another broadside.

But we received one from them in return which played the deuce with us, no less than ten men being killed and as many more wounded, and great damage done to the bulwarks and shrouds.

The Englishman was game to the very last, but when he received a broadside from the Bellfontaine and the Firefiend at the same time, it settled the business.

Down came her flag, and up went the cheers from our vessels. As the smoke cleared away, we beheld as bad a looking wreck as I ever wish to see.

A boat's crew was hastily put off from the victorious Firefiend, and I ordered Shannon to man one with twenty well armed men to go to Captain Hilton's assistance, knowing full well that it is always best to have a good company against John Bull, even if he is down.

Our late antagonist lay with her main yards aback, and as we got nearer to her we could see that she had been badly knocked about.

Captain Hilton was the first to mount the ladder and gain her deck, quickly followed by both boats' crews.

The commander stood by the gangway ready to receive him and to formally surrender, while all around lay mangled corpses by the score, and sullen men panting, stripped to the waist and grimy with sweat and the smut of burned powder.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TRAGIC MEETING.

SAID Captain Hilton to me afterwards, and while complimenting me for the part I took in the engagement:

"After the remainder of the crew had been got below and my men stood guard over them, and having a clear view of the deck, I beheld as ghastly a sight as the god of war ever gathered into so small a space. The main-deck was strewn with carcasses; for, in addition to the slaughter which our guns had made, one of the main-deck carronades had burst and killed nearly twenty men. I am used to horrible sights following a battle, but I must say that this one capped all I had ever seen. It was enough to freeze the marrow in a fellow's bones to see the torn bodies; the broad pools of blood on which the sunshine flashed, and which was pouring out of the scupper-holes, making long red lines down the ship's side and crimsoning the green water below," and he shuddered as he gave the recital—he, the hero of so many bloody fights and the owner of nerves I thought immovable.

The corvette was wrecked aloft more than appeared at first sight; her main-topmast was badly wounded; the after part of her main-top shot away, and to starboard her main-mast was sustained by only two shrouds. Indeed, if the wind freshened, these spars would surely go, unless the canvas was taken in and preventer back-stays set up; and Hilton at once set all available hands to doctoring. Indeed, no sooner was the surrender made secure than both boats were sent back to the Firefiend and the Bellfontaine for men, who were at once set to work.

Meanwhile, the commander of the Englishman stood sullenly by. Only two of his officers remained, the others having been killed in the action. In fact, he had received a wound himself.

"What frigate is this?" asked Hilton, turning to and speaking to him for the first time since receiving his sword.

"The Bosworth," said he, gruffly.

"Indeed; and you are Captain Gage," said Hilton, with great bitterness.

"Yes, and I need not ask your name," said Gage, pointing to the wolf's head and mask. "You are the Ocean Wolf, curse you."

"Do you know my name, sir?"

"No, and don't care to," said he, savagely.

"Well, perhaps it would make you feel happier at this particular time to know that it is George Hilton."

"What!" and Gage started back as though a poniard had entered his flesh.

"The man you have injured all that it is possible for one man to injure another. Where is my wife?"

Gage was speechless, and stood there like a statue gazing at him.

Hilton snatched the mask from his face.

"Do you recognize me now? or have I changed since last we met in the West Indies, and you ran away with my wife, only to desert her and leave her to die? Then I swore to have revenge on you, and when this war was declared, on you and your nation, and that no Englishman should ever see my face until I confronted you. I have captured you, and now, although we have both escaped death, one or both of us must die," said Hilton, with terrible earnestness.

"Would you assassinate me?"

"No, although a dog like you should be treated no better than that. Here is your sword. Take it and defend yourself, or I will kill you without mercy."

Gage was no coward, whatever else he was. Quick as thought he snatched the sword and threw himself on guard.

Such a strange supplement to the great war tragedy that had just been enacted was enough to attract all eyes and almost make all hearts stand still.

The men who were busy aloft or in clearing the deck of its red ghastliness stopped still and held their breath as they beheld the scene of the two enraged captains, cutting and slashing at each other with such terrible earnestness.

It was a picture worthy of the abode of the god of war.

Both men were quite evenly matched in point of strength and science, for Gage stood fully six feet high, well proportioned, and had the reputation of being the best swordsman in the British navy.

The combat was an encounter of giants, and was fierce to a terrible degree.

For fully five minutes it lasted, neither one of them speaking as they advanced and retreated around that quarter-deck, thrusting, slashing, parrying, each bent on the other's death.

Finally Captain Hilton knocked Gage's sword from his hand, and instantly ran him through the body with his own, holding the quivering body upon it for a moment, and then allowing it to sink upon the deck as he pulled it away.

"Curse you, curse you!" cried Gage, as he writhed in the agony of his death wound.

"Curse away, but you will steal no more foolish wives," replied Hilton, between his heavy breathing, as he stood over him.

"Curse you!" was the last words he spoke.

"Gentlemen, I suppose he was your friend," said Hilton, turning to the astonished officers. "If you wish to secure any of his personal effects, I permit you to do so, and then prepare him for the bottom of the sea," and combing the grime and perspiration from his forehead, he turned away to his astonished crew.

The other English officers awoke from their stupefaction and proceeded to prepare their late commander for burial.

As for Hilton, that mysterious man, he never mentioned the subject afterward, not even to his dying day; and nothing was ever known of the affair more than was found out at that time.

I tried on several occasions to draw the story from him, but all to no purpose.

As soon as the decks had been cleared of the dead and the wounded had been taken below to the surgeon's quarters, the work of repairing the *Bosworth* was resumed, and about three o'clock in the afternoon we were ready to proceed to Boston.

But it must not be supposed that the *Firefiend* came out of this engagement entirely unscathed. On the contrary, she had received much damage in her hull and rigging, besides losing nine of her best men and fully twenty more wounded, some of them so badly as to warrant their discharge.

But the victory was one of the most brilliant of the whole war, and that was certainly a great compensation.

We reached Boston the following day, and great was the joy of the citizens as the plucky little *Firefiend* conveyed her prizes into the harbor—two line-of-battle ships taken by a schooner of three hundred tons!

No wonder that the astonishment was great; no wonder that the people received us with salutes and shouts; no wonder that the city was illuminated in honor of such a victory, and that every member of the crew was regarded as a hero and feted accordingly.

It took ten days to make the repairs on the *Firefiend*, during which time the crew was allowed to go ashore and spend their prize money, or a portion of it, and Captain Hilton was engaged turning over his prisoners and prizes to the government officials at the Charlestown Navy Yard.

Indeed, having charge of the repairs to the schooner, I saw but little of him until we were ready to sail, when he again came on board, the same calm, mysterious hero as ever, ready for another battle.

So uncommonly rich had been our prizes that the commonest sailor would probably receive for this short term of service at least twenty thousand dollars, while the officers would be made rich beyond expectation.

The citizens sent us off with glad shouts, while the guns in the forts

around thundered forth their God-speed as we caught the morning breeze and once more stood out of the harbor.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE OCEAN WAVE ONCE MORE.

I AM aware of the fact that I have thus far in my log said but little regarding the members of the noble crew of the *Firefiend*, but this has been on account of the tragic activity that has prevailed almost ever since I went on board, and not because they were not worth mentioning individually.

But after starting on our third cruise there were several days in which we had but little to do, and I know that I never spent a more agreeable time in my life than I did with the officers under me, and in listening to the yarns of the crew.

In my watch there were some of the queerest characters ever encountered.

They were nearly all Americans, and for the most part hardy New England sailors, who had been born and bred upon the water, one might almost say, and among such a crew of perfect sea-devils as they were one would scarcely expect to find much jollity.

But when cruising as we now were, with no enemy in sight, the captain allowed them a large share of liberty from that severe discipline which he maintained at any other time, and the men congregated on the fore-castle and in the waist of the schooner to spin yarns, sing songs, and even shake their legs to the music of an old fiddle, which one of them could play tolerably well.

One of the gunners, by the name of Josh Pewter, attracted my attention from the first. He was a comical sort of fellow both to look at and to listen to, and was a great favorite with every one on board. He was a genuine Yankee in every respect, even to his reckless handling of the truth, but in this matter I soon found that he lied in such a comic vein that he was readily listened to and pardoned by his mates.

As I came on deck to take my watch the second day after we had sailed, Josh was seated on one of the gun carriages amidships, surrounded by a number of grinning messmates, to whom he was spinning a yarn about some remarkable herb that he had found on one of the smaller West India Islands.

"Was it good to eat?" I heard one of them ask him.

"Eat! eat!" exclaimed Josh, glaring at him; "wal, I guess not."

"Was it pizen?" asked another.

"No."

"Wal, what about it, anyhow?"

"Eat!" I heard Josh ejaculate. "Yer put it in rum."

"Did it make the rum better?"

"Wal, yes, guess so, for some things."

"Tell us about it, Josh."

Josh let drive a stream of tobacco juice through one of the scupper-holes, and then, while he shifted his quid into the other cheek, his face assumed a serious look.

"Messmates," he began, after a moment's pause, "I don't want ter tell this 'ere story an' have yer think I'm lyin'. Fun's one thing, but when yer tellin' 'bout a real thing in nater, I b'lieve in stickin' ter ther truth," said he, earnestly.

"Well, go ahead; we'll believe you."

"Wal, yer must, or else I won't tell it."

"Heave ahead, shipmate."

"Wal, what I war agoin' ter tell yer about is a curus sort of a weed that I found out thar. It grows only 'bout so high, and has a real nice stink ter it that makes yer sort o' sleepy if yer ship a good nose full on it. Wal, me'n my shipmates we thort as how it might be good in our rum ter sort o' give it a nice taste, yer know."

"Bah!" came from every man standing around, which caused Josh to look up in surprise.

"Just as though rum needed anything to make it taste better," said one of them, a sentiment to which they all assented.

"Now, who's a-findin' fault with rum? I wouldn't find fault with it if I had a panakin full on it right under my nose. What I war sayin' war this: we war sorter 'sperimentin', don't yer see? Wal, we put some o' it in our rum an' tried it. It tasted fine. I never thort good rum could be improved, but this sent us right aloft in no time. But it was dreadful unhandy to have aboard ship. Might er been good 'nough on shore, whar a man don't have any watches," he added.

"How so?"

"'Cos one dram of it put us ter sleep, an' we slept a whole week."

"What!" several of them exclaimed.

"Fact, by thunder! We slept a whole week, four of us, an' I can prove it. Never knowed a thing till we woke up. So the skipper he took it away from us, an' said as how it was too expensive for general use, an' that he'd take it to Boston an' show it ter some big doctor. But that ar isn't ther strangest thiug 'bout it," he added, again sending a brown stream through the scupper hole and shifting his quid back into his starboard cheek. "Our skipper war bald as that gun, an' as he war anxious ter git married agin, he felt orful mean 'bout it, an' war all the time tryin' ter find somethin' that would bring his har out agin. He tried everythin' he could hear tell 'bout, but it war no use. So when he got our jug o' rum inter his cabin he began ter rub it on his bar upper works ter see if that would do any good. Shipmates, that thar fetched it."

"Made it grow?"

"Grow! grow! wal, I should caserly remark that it did."

"Rum's good for most anything," mused one old sea dog who was an attentive listener.

"Shipmates, we didn't any on us know him arter he put it on the second time, his har had come out so thick. Never seen nuthin' like it, but ther skipper war orful pleased, I tell yer."

"That was wonderful, indeed."

"Wonderful? Wait 'til yer hear all 'bout it. His har had grown so in a week's time that he sent for me to shear it for him. Yer see, I war sort-o' handy at them jobs. Wal, he squatted on a bucket on ther quarter-deck, an' I begun; but that thar medicine got ther best o' me."

"Got the best of you?"

"How?"

"Wal, ther har growd faster nor I could cut it, it did, by thunder! I sheared away on one side, an' when I had got that purty short I started for ther other; an' by the time that thar war sheared, ther other war long 'nough ter cut."

"Great guns!"

"Thunder and hurricanes!"

"Whew!" and various other exclamations, mingled with uproarious laughter and the slapping of each other on the back, followed the finish of Josh Pewter's story.

"I tell yer, it's a fact, an' I can prove it."

"That's too much, Josh; we can never haul that yarn all aboard."

"Don't I tell yer that it's a fact?" roared the gunner, springing to his feet and glaring at his shipmates savagely. "Warn't I thar? Didn't I see that har grow? Didn't I shear that har?"

"Well?"

"Wal! I don't want no wals, I don't. Yer laugh at me when I tell a story, an' that's as much as ter say I lie, I, Josh Pewter, an' I won't stan' it, der yer hear, shipmates?" he asked, looking from one to another, ready to fight one or a dozen of them.

"Oh, we don't pretend to doubt your word," said one of the sailors, soothingly.

"No, we was only laughing at the joke of the thing," added another in the same vein.

"Joke!" roared Josh, seemingly madder than ever.

"Why, yes; the idea of his hair's growing so fast," put in another.

"Joke! Thar's no joke about it, I tell yer."

"No joke?" asked several, and they all showed much interest now.

"Nary a joke. It killed him!"

"Killed him?"

"As shure's that gun's a gun," replied Josh.

"Tell us about it."

"Wal, I kept a-cuttin' an' a-cuttin' of the skipper's har durin' all my watch on deck, an' then, when Bill Browser took the watch, he took the shears an' he cut an' cut until we got har 'nough ter make a bed. But it was too great a strain on his timbers," he added, shaking his head sadly.

"How so?"

"Wal, he sorter seemed ter go all ter har, an' finally he keeled over an' kicked ther bucket he was settin' on."

"What for?"

"Shipmates, it was his last kick."

"Died?"

"Yes; nothin' left but skin an' bones. All went ter har," said he, sorrowfully.

There was a moment's silence, and then fifty hoarse voice joined in sending up one of the loudest laughing roars that I ever heard.

Josh protested, but it did no good. Old St. Michael himself could not have forced that yarn down their throats and made them believe it, any more than he could keep them from laughing.

But this was one of Pewter's peculiarities; no matter how wild and extravagant the yarn was that he might tell, he would insist upon it that it was true, and get as mad as a bull if anybody presumed to doubt it.

He walked sulkily forward and soon disappeared in the forecabin, while the men continued to laugh, all the more heartily, perhaps, because they saw me doing so.

Indeed, it was as good as a play, although I can give but a poor account of it in my log. Such a lie and such a liar I had never seen and heard before, although I was afterwards informed that this was only a little one compared with some of the yarns he had spun among his shipmates.

I was becoming socially interested in the man and anticipating something else, when the lookout in the foretop called out, "sail ho!"

"Where away?" I called to him, and Hilton had heard the man and was quickly on deck.

"About three points on our larboard quarter, sir," replied the man.

CHAPTER X.

A TERRIBLE SUSPENSE.

It was now nearly sunset and we were well out of sight of land, although Cape Cod stood on one starboard quarter, and we had all the sea room we wanted.

As the afternoon had worn away the blue of the New England sky had grown thicker without my hardly noticing it, and although every cloud had vanished, yet there was a smoky sort of a veil, through which the blue was visible, but pale and sickly-looking, and this appeared to be drawing up all around the horizon, while the sun in the west shone with intense heat, though with a dull, reddish, subdued light, like the look of a full moon on a hot August night.

The hail from the lookout had aroused me, and I was surprised at the changes that had taken place while I had been listening to Josh

Pewter's yarn. I looked in the direction indicated for the sail but could see nothing, so taking a telescope I ran forward and trotted aloft to have a view of the stranger before darkness came, when the canvas of a brig hove to with her nose to the eastward and her fore-top sail to the mast was brought into the field of vision.

Believing that she was not alone I shinned to the royal-yard, and from that great elevation I searched the sea, but the brig was all I could discover. But I examined her closely for some time, and when I reached the deck the ocean lay darkling, and of the gorgeous sunset that I had noticed before going aloft nothing now remained but a dull, reddish flush, lingering over a huge bank of clouds in the east.

Captain Hilton asked me how far I calculated the brig to be off, and I told him about twelve miles, together with other particulars regarding her as I made them out with the telescope.

Meanwhile out of the west, wherein lay the reflection of the setting sun, a fresh wind was whistling and striking one's lips with a salt and tart flavor from the whipping of the foaming surface of the water, and the Firefiend was tearing through the water at a great rate, although under her mainsail sail and jib only, with the muzzles of her star-board tier of guns almost level with the flashing foam that whirled away alongside.

Hilton walked hurriedly to the binnacle to have a look at the compass, and then looked over the side, after which he ordered the fore-sail and main-topmast stay-sail to be set. These were large cloths, and under them one could feel the Firefiend rip through the water at a wild rate, while the parted breakers dashed from her bows and kept a humming like the continued roll of a drum, as we headed directly for the brig.

Before darkness fairly closed in upon us, we had risen the stranger so as to render her visible from the decks, though even with our glasses we could not make her out.

When night really came upon us the wind died out, and it was as dark as a nigger's pocket. The schooner rested upon the water, rolling gently to the swell which the wind had left, and her sails rattled against the rigging in sounds so like musket reports as to frequently cause me to start and look around. The darkness was so intense that from the skylight the figure of a man at the helm was invisible, and a ponderous black sky overhead seemed to touch our mast-heads.

Here and there a gleam of light raised a luminous mist along the obscure decks, coming from the main hatch, the galley, and from the skylight over the cabin; and as the figures of the men passed through this illuminated mist, it was a strange sight to see their ragged forms, their eyes glistening, and their breasts exposed, and their naked arms swinging to and fro, and then be lost in the darkness.

Captain Hilton was on deck, silently smoking a cigar and pacing back and forth, more nervous than I had often seen him. He called my name, and I went to him, guided by the light of his cigar.

"Mr. Winthrop, how far do you fancy the brig was from us when the wind dropped?" he asked.

"I have been thinking, sir," said I, "and according to my notion she can't be above two miles away."

"I agree with you—our reckoning tallies. Pass the word forward to hide all lights, and get a tarpaulin stretched over the skylight."

These orders were obeyed, and I again returned to where he was standing in the darkness. Indeed, I had to feel my way along now that all lights were out.

"I never experienced a darker and more stifling night than this," he remarked. "What do you think of it?"

"I think there's mischief in it," said I.

"It may be; but I see no signs of wind. I have stationed a couple of men forward with orders to keep their ears open. We must be near to that brig at all events. She may be a friend or a foe."

"I am suspicious of her, sir," said I.

He mused awhile, pulling fiercely at his cigar, and finally called out to Mr. Shannon:

"Call some men aft to get this mainsail in. Let go the staysail halyards, and get both jibs stowed. Let everybody keep silence."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"This is the business of the fog again," I suggested.

"Yes, in one sense," he mused, "only there is no sulphur in fogs."

"Sulphur!"

"Or lightning. That is what I am afraid of, Mr. Winthrop. I think of my powder magazine."

I could but think of it as well, and as he made no further remark I said nothing. The signs, so far as we could make them out, were not quite what we could have wished to see, and that darkened hush upon the face of the deep was certainly ominous.

The men came along the decks like cats, and although they had to grope their way, they presently had the canvas taken in, and this quieted the schooner, though the foresail gave a short slap occasionally as the vessel rolled, and sometimes the shrouds complained to the swell.

Captain Hilton was on the quarter-deck, smoking his cigar in silence, and when I started to leave him and go forward, he called me:

"Get the nettings triced up, and pass the word along for the watch below to keep wide awake, ready for a call to quarters. Also clap a round of grape over the round shot in the chasers, and send the carpenter aft."

These orders were promptly executed, and when I returned to the quarter-deck Hilton was talking to the carpenter.

"It can be easily managed," he was saying, evidently explaining some idea of his; "you can lash (for you must not nail, as I do not wish any noise aboard) some boards to each side of the cask, and that

will keep the bung-hole uppermost. See that your light is securely fitted, and get a jewelblock made fast to the extreme end of the flying jib-boom, with lines rove, so that when the cask is overboard, it can be hauled away to the length of those booms from the schooner's bow or stern. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then get about it at once. There is no harm in making ready," he added, addressing me.

"Right, sir. Hark! what is that?"

"Rain," said he; and at that instant a heavy drop, warm as a gout of blood, struck my face.

But only a few drops fell out of the inky sky, and then all was silent again. It was oppressively hot, with not a breath of air stirring. I looked at the compass, and found that the schooner had drifted and held her head to the north.

Everything was as silent as death, and any one wishing to know what highly-wrought suspense or expectation is, should have been with us there. Think of being becalmed in total darkness within hail of a vessel of which you know nothing, and whose boats may be close alongside, even while you are wondering whether she has seen you or not.

"And to add to the situation, we have a sooty air full of hell's lightning, likely at any moment to burst asunder and fire us from stem to stern," said Hilton, as though partaking of my reverie.

While standing thus a man came aft.

"Will you please step forward, sir?" said he, addressing Captain Hilton.

"What is it?" he asked, in a whisper.

"We fancy that we heard the dip of oars just now, sir, and would like to have your opinion."

I went forward with them and listened, straining my eyes against the darkness, and presently we heard the dripping sound made by muffled oars when they are lifted out of the water.

CHAPTER XI.

WORKING IN THE DARK.

"Ah! I expected this," said Captain Hilton, turning to me in the darkness, as we listened to the almost imperceptible noise of water dripping from the blades of muffled oars as they are lifted from the water by the rowers.

"But yet we do not know whether they are friend or foe," said I.

"True, but it must be our business to find out whether they are or not. Mr. Shannon, send the carpenter aft at once. Tell him to make no noise. Mr. Winthrop, see that the men are all ready to go to quarters, silently," and I flew to obey his orders.

The carpenter and his men went aft, and by this time the sound of the approaching oars had become quite audible, although they were evidently being worked with extreme caution.

"Carpenter," said Hilton, "the blaze must be dropped astern, for the boats are undoubtedly yonder. Make ready to lower it overboard, and be careful not to douse the light in hauling on the line. Be silent and careful."

"Ay, ay, sir!" he replied, in a whisper, and then calling the names of his men in the same tone of voice—for it was so dark that one's hand could not be seen at arm's length—he proceeded to carry out his instructions.

It was a wonderful thing to feel—for you could not see—the men and officers creeping about the deck, some listening with all their senses on edge, and others silently preparing for action and getting up the nettings to resist boarders.

The carpenter got his bariel afloat smartly, and in a few moments a blue light, fixed to the bung of a cask, began to float slowly away from the schooner, and to illuminate the water with an unearthly glare.

Only a short distance away the light threw up the outline of two large boats, each containing at least fifty armed men, their weapons appearing in the unearthly light as though streaked with lines of burning brimstone, while beyond the ocean stretched away into ebony blackness.

The motionless boats looked like huge centipedes, with their oars forking out on either side, while the pale blue outlines of their crowded crews seemed like sketches done in phosphorus.

"That's it!" I heard Hilton exclaim, as he ran to the gunners. "Their uniforms give them away; they are Britishers, sure enough. Now, take good aim and fire while the light holds."

The Englishmen saw the trick and with a growl they bent to their oars to pull out of sight and get away.

Too late, however, for the terrible belch of three trained broadside guns, loaded with fearful charges of grape-shot, blinded every one of us for a moment, and this was instantly followed by a crash and a whirlwind of curses and shrieks, giving unmistakable proof of how our shower of shot had told upon them.

The next instant all was dark and silent again. We listened, but the waves had evidently swallowed up everything contained in those two crowded launches. Not one seemed to have been left to tell the tale.

But scarcely a minute of silent watching on our part, for any new manifestation from our unseen enemy, who could not be lying far away had passed, when, as if in rebuke of our popgun imitation of Heaven's artillery, the blackness about us was rent asunder and eaten up by an astounding flash of lightning that revealed the surface of the water for miles around.

This was followed by a peal of thunder which seemed to shake heaven and earth, and to almost paralyze us all.

But Captain Hilton's quick eye and cool nerve did not forsake him, and while the glare of the thunderbolt lasted he saw, about a mile distant to the eastward, a large sloop-of-war, the build of which would have proclaimed her English had we not already seen the uniforms of some of her crew whom we had sent below out of the reach of further harm.

No one but Hilton saw this, for not one of us was there who did not seem rooted and frozen to the deck. Indeed, for an instant it was hard to believe that the schooner had not thumped heavily upon a rock, so dreadfully did the concussion in the heavens shake us.

I beheld the men standing motionless, men unknown to fear, but now in the very act of it, and before they recovered down came the rain in a whole sheet, mingled with hail that boomed upon our deck like a gale of wind through the rigging of a line-of-battle-ship.

In an instant almost we were awash, and the water pouring in huge streams out of the scupper holes, and the sea around us flashing up in froth under the heavy down-pour, whilst the lightning seemed hurled like giants' lances from the clouds, revealing by their lurid light the huge folds of angry storm-heads above us.

A storm had indeed burst upon us with a vengeance. It was directly overhead, and sharper lightning or more deafening thunder was never heard outside of the tropical latitudes. The rain and hail fell perpendicularly and with such weight that it was sufficient to stand upright under the discharge. It poured down my back so fast that it filled my shirt full from my waist up, making me feel as though buttoned up in one of those skins which the Arabs carry water in in their journeys along the African coast or across the desert.

Moreover, not only was the cannonading of the thunder perfectly bewildering, but the eyes were rendered almost useless by the quick changes between the dazzling blue flashes and the dreadful darkness which followed; but presently the longer intervals between the flashes convinced us that the storm was moving away to the eastward.

Suddenly the down-pour almost ceased, and then we heard a voice hailing us alongside.

A lantern was slung over, and a man in the last stage of exhaustion was seen clinging to one of the main chain plates. A bowline was lowered into which he dropped his almost palsied arms, and we hoisted him over the bulwarks.

He proved to be an English Jack tar, but how he had managed to keep afloat and to live through the dreadful storm we could not understand.

He was completely limp, and was carried below for the surgeon to work upon, and in the course of fifteen minutes he revived sufficiently to inform us that he had been one of the boats' crew, every other one of which he believed to have been either killed or drowned, since both boats were completely smashed to pieces, and that they belonged to the English sloop-of-war Norfolk, pierced for fourteen guns and mounting six long nine-pounders, and one twenty-four-pound brass pivot; being lately from the waters around New York and cruising hereabouts in quest of merchant vessels, or, in fact, any sort with which they might fall in, her crew being fully two hundred all told.

"Humph!" mused Hilton, as he listened to the sailor's story. "One hundred sent to Davy Jones' locker—that would leave them but one hundred with which to work the vessel," and then he fell to musing as he sucked his cigar.

"What do you think of the weather?" I ventured to ask, but he did not hear me.

"Winthrop, we must take that big fellow."

"I think we can do it, sir," said I.

"I know we can, for the loss of so many of her crew will make the difference in our weight of metal about equal. Would to God that morning and a wind would come!"

"And probably they are praying for the same thing quite as earnestly as we are."

"Undoubtedly. Get the men below for a change, those of them that are wet; give them each an extra ration of grog, and keep them well in hand for an emergency."

I went to see these orders obeyed, and while I was absent Hilton had ordered the watch to take down the nettings, feeling certain that there would be no further attempt at boarding us that night, and a double lookout was stationed forward, astern, and aloft.

I came on deck to report that everything was as he had ordered, and just then we were startled by a bright glare on board the Englishman (for we knew his bearings well by the lightning, as he of course knew ours), and a ball flashed up the water just astern of us.

Hardly had the report of the enemy's gun left our ears when a sharply uttered order from Captain Hilton filled the decks of the schooner with the glare of battle lanterns, and the crew stood at quarters, waiting the word of command. Hilton was standing by the binnacle watching the compass, and I saw that he was waiting for the schooner to drift broadside on to the enemy.

CHAPTER XII.

A BATTLE AND A CHASE.

WHILE we were thus waiting for the schooner to drift around, for as yet there was no wind to move her, the enemy away in the dark, but who was revealed to us by the flash of his guns, kept blazing away at us with his stern gun as fast as he could load.

He had elevated the piece, so that the bullets whistled and tore through our rigging and struck the water a long ways ahead of us. It was impossible to see what mischief they did, on account of the terrible darkness; but sometimes a rope's end would fall on the deck, sometimes a block, and once there was a small crash of splintered

wood aloft, as though a spar had been struck, but nothing heavy fell to the deck.

Slowly the Firefiend was drifting broadside onto the industrious enemy.

"Have you her bearings, men?" Hilton finally called from his stand by the binnacle.

"Ay, ay, sir?"

"Good! Wait for their next flash to point. Aim low. Now you have her—fire!"

Well, if ever a vessel was raked, that sloop-of-war was. She was within point-blank range of the carronades, and the aim of the gunners was exact.

By this time she had canted sufficiently to enable her to bring her broadside guns to bear, and the next instant she flashed into a whole sheet of flame, and we could hear portions of the shower of iron hail tearing up the sea fathoms away from us, though some of the shots hulled us, as any person could have told by the quivering of the schooner.

The battle was now opened in its full fury, broadside after broadside was exchanged, the enemy, as well as ourselves, traversing the guns from the empty to the loaded side, because of the total lack of wind to operate the vessels.

We exchanged six broadsides in this way, but our seventh was not answered. The lightning had entirely ceased, so that we could not see the sloop after she ceased firing, but the compass bearings told us that the Firefiend had swung her bow on to her; ascertaining which, I sprang into the waist and ordered the fore-castle gun to be double shotted and fired.

But the Englishman made no reply.

I mounted the bulwarks to see if I could make her out, and while there I felt a draught of wind.

"A breeze!" I cried.

"Yes, confound her, and she'll get the first of it," replied Hilton, who had discovered it quite as soon as I did.

"That is so," I replied, and then I joined Hilton and his officers on the quarter-deck.

"After her, then, my hearties! All hands to make sail! Lively, lads—lively!" he called.

A dozen of the crew bounded over the main throat and peak halyards, when, crack! the whole lot of them lay sprawling on their backs, with the halyards all about them.

The gear had been severed by one of the enemy's shots, and the troublesome business of reefing fresh halyards had to be performed.

But this was not the only wound our rigging had received. The jib halyards had been cut in halves; the gaff topsail sheet was on deck, and a couple of back-stays were trailing overboard, and we knew not what else had happened to us.

However, all available canvas was set, the helm put down, and under the freshening breeze the Firefiend started along the course which her commander deemed the sloop to be heading, if, indeed, she was endeavoring to get away from us.

Trifling repairs such as were absolutely needed were soon made, and in less than fifteen minutes we were under a press of sail, headed south, and making good leeway.

The wind by this time had freshened into a strong breeze, and all around the sky had cleared and the stars were peeping forth. The sea began to break into spaces of foam, and the roaring noise at our bows, and the gleam of the belt of froth scurrying within reach of a man's arm along the lee side, and the hooting up aloft made by the wind, and the fierce patter of the spray upon the fore-castle indicated the speed of the Firefiend.

But as yet we had not obtained a glimpse of the enemy. Hilton was nervous and excited.

"Put your helm up!" he finally cried. "Ease away your sheets fore and aft. Fore-topsail yard, there!" he called to the lookout.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Look brightly about you and report the sloop the moment you see her."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Mr. Winthrop, call the watch. A stern chase is a long chase."

As he spoke eight bells were struck, and I found I had the pleasure of remaining on deck during the next four hours, but as I had had no supper, I requested Shannon to keep my lookout for a short spell and went below to change my clothing and get something to eat, as did Captain Hilton, although he appeared to be in no humor for conversation.

On returning to the deck, almost the first object that met my searching gaze ahead was a shadow of the sloop, a large square blot which the telescope resolved into a whole cloud of canvas. I put my head into the skylight and told Hilton of it, and he at once joined me.

He took the glass and examined her carefully.

"I think your bow-gun can reach her," he mused. "Up with every cloth that will hold wind!"

The men flew to obey this order, but in the midst of the work the top-gallant studding-sail boom snapped short off at the iron, and the sail blew away like a puff of smoke from a gun. In truth, the wind was fast freshening into a moderate gale, and had we been beating we could have done so with reefed sails, but this mishap sensibly diminished our headway, but there was no help for it then.

Just then the enemy shifted her helm and we shifted ours, but scarcely had we got the wind abeam when crack! the gib-sheet parted, and before the down-haul could be made the sail had flogged itself into rags.

I watched our spars anxiously, for it was still impossible to know how the Englishman's shot had told. One crash of splintering wood aloft had been heard, and I waited to see which spar had been wounded by seeing it go overboard.

But nothing gave away, though our press of sail was enormous. Indeed, I never saw any vessel so driven as the Firefiend now was, the lee-rail of the high bulwarks being almost flush with the seething foam, and walking the decks almost an impossibility, while the bellying and booming overhead was almost deafening.

"Make ready the bow-gun!" roared Hilton. "Let her go off a point!" he added to the four men whom it required to steer the schooner.

It was no fool of a job to bring her up, but as she finally did so he shouted "Fire!"

The flame flashed over the nose of the schooner, and a smother of smoke was blown down upon the water ahead of us. But what the effect of the shot had been we could not tell. However, Hilton ordered them to keep firing as fast as they could load, and nothing pleased the gun's crew better.

We held on steadily, and in a short time the dawn began to show in the east. The light showed that we had begun to close the chase, and also that our shots, which had been fired regularly every five minutes during the last hour, had done much damage to the sloop aloft. But she was doing her best to escape, and every now and then sent us a shot from her long eighteen, trained through one of her after ports, although doing us no harm.

All of a sudden Hilton, who had been all the while intently watching the fleeing enemy with his telescope, jumped down from the carronade on which he had been standing and hastened to the cabin.

What it meant I could not tell, but after being gone about five minutes he returned and again took up his telescope.

"Yes, just as I suspected," he finally said, and his officers gathered eagerly around him. "He is heading recklessly for the Bay Shoals, upon which he must run or come up in the wind so sharp that we can give him a broadside," and he looked aloft as though to make sure that the schooner had all the sail on that there was room for.

I sprang into the shrouds with a glass, and from that elevation could plainly make out the breakers toward which the sloop was heading with all of her enormous press of canvas, so intent upon watching her plucky little pursuer, evidently, that she did not see the danger.

Interest and anxiety were on tip-toe, and I could plainly see by Hilton's looks that he felt disgusted with such cowardly seamanship that might wreck a valuable prize which he felt sure of capturing, provided he could get a good chance to fight.

"The fools!" he ejaculated. "Stop firing, and perhaps they will recover sense enough to look ahead instead of at us. Another five minutes and they will be aground."

"What a shame when they stand such a good chance of being taken," said Shannon.

"But perhaps they preferred to run aground so as to have a better excuse for being taken," suggested Mr. Hull.

"Ah! by Jove, there she goes!" exclaimed Hilton, and, looking, we saw that she had come to a sudden stand-still, and that her spars had all gone by the board as though they had been so many pipe-stems.

The high rate of speed which she was under when she struck had run her high upon the shoal, and we could see at least one-half of her coffer gleaming in the morning sun as she lay canted towards it, and she was indeed a sad picture of wreck as she lay there with her sails and rigging tossing in the water alongside like a mass of tangled seaweed and the waves breaking over in smoke.

"That settles Johnny. But we must rescue them, not only for the reputation of our country, but because of the booty which we may get out of her, even if she is a wreck. Winthrop, I select you for the task," he added.

I sang out to the boatswain to pipe the crew of the first cutter away, a large, powerful boat, pulled by twelve oars, and all was in readiness to launch the moment we got near enough to come up into the wind.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CRUISE AND A SHARP ENGAGEMENT.

In five minutes more the schooner came up into the wind and lost her headway, leaving us nearly half a mile from the shoals where the English sloop-of-war lay a total wreck, and being terribly flogged by the waves which broke over the beautiful but helpless hull.

They had managed in some way to set a signal of distress on a jury mast at the stern, which was not only a token of surrender, but an appeal to our mercy as well.

I stood in the stern sheets of the cutter as it was shoved from the schooner, and twelve lusty oars dipped quickly into the seething water.

The waves were much livelier than I had supposed them to be, or they seemed to be, owing to our having just left the decks of a stanch schooner and taking our places in the cutter.

At one moment the boat would be thrown up to the summit of a roaring sea, whose foamy crest boiled and surged above the gunwales and covered us with hissing spume, and from there we seemed to look down as from a hilltop upon the surrounding plain of waters, where in one place lay the beautiful Firefiend, bowing to the waves like a noble steed, and in another place, for which we were steering, the motionless sloop-of-war, over which the sea was tossing a hazy spray, her hinder part black with human beings watching us, and then in

another moment down we would go between two hills of green water, where not a breath of air reached us, although the spray flew over our heads in wreaths and clusters like clouds of snow. It was a picture long to be remembered.

I steered the boat to the leeward and made signs to the people on the fore-castle to coil down a rope ready to pitch to us, and when we had the rope's end on board, the boat was hauled cautiously towards the wreck. The hull acted as a sort of breakwater, and the sea was quite smooth under the lee of her.

I never recall the scene which greeted me on reaching the deck without feeling how beggarly words are as reflectors of facts. But I was not there to moralize, and remembering it I at once sought out the commander of the sloop and received his surrender, after which I made arrangements to transfer his crew to the *Firefiend*.

This occupied nearly all day, so many of them were there, and each man wanted to save his personal effects, after which we made sail for Boston for the purpose of turning our prisoners over to the government and procuring assistance in saving what was possible of the noble wreck.

This amounted in value to nearly one hundred thousand dollars, which made our victory no slight affair after all, although had we caught and captured her before she ran upon the shoals we should have had thousands for prize money where we only had hundreds. However, we were in no humor for complaining, seeing that we had thus far done better than any other privateer.

A fortnight from that time we were once more on the bounding billows, bound on a cruise. The weather was fine, and for several days we encountered nothing to quicken our blood. Indeed, we managed this time to round Cape Cod and to stand southwest, leaving Nantucket on our lee bow, headed for the eastern end of Long Island, where Captain Hilton calculated upon finding more game.

Four or five days' run brought us in sight of Montauk Point without meeting any but friendly sails, and when on the point of entering Long Island Sound to continue our cruise, we met the *Dancing Shadow*, another famous privateer, and from her commander learned that there was nothing to be met with in that direction, so Hilton decided to run outside and see what could be found on the broad Atlantic.

By this time we began to be uneasy and to wonder if the enemy and the rich prizes sailing under his flag had all left the latitude.

A bright lookout was all the while maintained, but another week passed without our seeing any but friendly hulls. By this time we were about fifty miles south of Long Island, out upon the broad, bold ocean, sailing first one way and then another, as the wind served best, while the crew laid about the deck, killing time by spinning yarns and singing all sorts of songs, while Captain Hilton was continually chafing like a caged lion.

He and I were seated at the cabin table one day about this time. Dinner had been partaken of and we were conversing over a bottle of wine, when Mr. Hull, whose watch it was on deck, came down the companion-ladder.

"There is a sail in sight, sir."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Hilton. "Well, is it possible that the spell is broken by anything?"

"Yes, sir, about a point on our weather bow, but she is only to be seen now and then as the mist clears," replied Hull.

"Go and see what you can make of her," said Hilton, turning to me, and I at once went on deck.

"Whereaway is yon sail?" I asked.

He pointed and I looked, but nothing was in sight, so I took a glass and went aloft.

I looked for a long time without seeing any signs of a sail, but presently the mist cleared and I saw the spars and hull of a large vessel under easy canvas, and not more than five miles off.

She was evidently a West Indiaman, and Hilton fixed his glass upon her after I reported. She was now in full view heeling over under three royals, for she was a full rigged ship, and about three points on our lee bow. Suddenly Hilton discovered a maneuver on board the stranger, and spoke up quickly:

"Tiller, there! Starboard your helm!—so. Keep her full now. Ease away that main-sheet. Lay aft some hands and set the gaff-topsail. She wants to get away from us, does she? Ease off those fore-sheets. Tail on to the outer jib-halyards—loose the flying jib!"

He sprang over to the weather side of the deck and cast an eager look at the trim of the canvas, and, apparently satisfied, returned to the quarter deck. The *Firefiend* was going through the water like a comet, her press of canvas actually dragging her channels under.

"Pipe all hands to quarters. Get the nettings triced up and close the hatches. If she was a Yankee ship I know she would hail us."

While the men were bustling to quarters a spot of color was blown out from her peak halyards, and we instantly recognized the Stars and Stripes.

"That won't do, my fine fellow—that is an old game, but it won't go down!" exclaimed Hilton. "I'll swear that that flag is a lie, and that you are English."

"Time will prove," said I. "We are gaining on her rapidly, sir."

"I see it, but what do you think of her?" he asked.

"To tell you the truth, captain, she looks to me like an American ship," I replied.

"Perhaps she is, but I am bound to find out for a certainty. Let go our ensign, Mr. Hull."

"Aye, aye, sir," and presently it fluttered proudly in the breeze.

Not a soul could we see on board, and as soon as we were near enough, we let fly a gun at her as a hint to heave to, but she paid no

attention to the challenge. We waited for a few moments, and while still in doubt, she let go her royal and topgallant halyards, and hauled up their courses, put their helm down, and throwing their vessel almost athwart our hawser, fired a broadside of six guns at us.

The abruptness of this maneuver would have disconcerted a man of less nerve than Hilton possessed, but he instantly turned and motioned to the men at the tiller.

The *Firefiend* fell off, and we bore swiftly down upon the enemy, for such we could no longer doubt her to be, but the instant she presented her stern to us we raked her with five guns, and could hear the shot as they ripped her hull or tore through her rigging.

Before the smoke of our guns had cleared away, the sail trimmers whipped half the canvas off the schooner, and there we were to windward, under jib and foresail only, and within hailing distance, so close, indeed, that we could easily see the men at the portholes working the guns.

At this point a man wearing a red cap got upon the bulwarks over the weather quarter galley, and with the utmost calmness surveyed us.

He was evidently in command, but not an English naval officer by any manner of means, although the American flag had been hauled down and the Union Jack run up in its place at the first broadside.

"Aim at that fellow, some of you small-arms men!" shouted Hilton.

Half a dozen muskets were leveled; they flashed at the moment our two after guns were fired, and the man disappeared behind the bulwarks, while our big guns brought down the main-topgallant mast with a fearful crash.

But a murderous discharge was directed at us a moment afterward. A shower of splinters fly from our fore-castle rail, and the parted fore-top-gallant-stay fell quickly to the mast, while whole clouds of falling canvas fell upon a group of small-arms men who were stationed in the waist.

"No matter, lads! The sail's a rag, and well doused. Aft here, and rattle up this mainsail!" called Captain Hilton, cheerily, while the gunners kept pegging away with awful effect.

By this time the two vessels had drawn close together. There was not a ship's length between us. Our shot had already knocked two of the ship's gun-ports into one; her sides were studded with shot, and her bulwarks were like a sieve, but what the slaughter was we could not see, because she stood so high above us, to say nothing of her high bulwarks.

On the other hand, our hull was badly hurt; at each discharge of the enemy's guns our men were being taken away, and it was plain to be seen if this battering did not soon cease the ship would fight herself clear of us. Indeed, such firmness and plucky fighting on the part of a merchantman, as she really appeared to be, was quite unexpected.

But Hilton was equal to the occasion, and motioning the helm to be put over, it was not a full minute before the two vessels were grinding their sides together, and our brave captain armed to the teeth, was the first to climb aboard, although he was closely followed by at least fifty of the crew.

Of what followed I cannot pretend to give a close account. I remember hacking and hewing with my cutlass at the netting, climbing over and finally through it; falling upon the enemy's deck; of gaining my feet, and seeing Hilton and a number of brave fellows making the air alive with the gleaming of their polished cutlasses; of joining them, and finding myself stabbing, thrusting, parrying, half blinded by blood, but whether my own or an enemy's I did not know; opposed by a furious mob of excited beings, the most of them naked to the waist, and yet in this moment of wild excitement, I remember seeing Hilton, and noted how rapidly the enemy who opposed him fell under the mighty sweep of his terrible sword, but just then I was borne to the bloody deck among the dead and the dying, a half dozen of the enemy on top of me, and then consciousness fled and all was silence!

What happened after that I know nothing about, neither do I know to this day how long I remained insensible. But on coming to myself I opened my eyes, and they rested upon the whiskered, begrimed face of Second-mate Hull.

He was bending anxiously over me as though trying to make out if I was really dead, but seeing me open my eyes, he caught me by the hand and lifted me from among the dead bodies and got me upon my feet.

"Not dead, thank God! not dead," he exclaimed, and then he repeated it to Captain Hilton.

I looked and saw him seated upon a gun, panting, begrimed and bloody, still holding his reeking cutlass in his hand.

"What is it? Where are we, Hull?" I asked, even then scarcely comprehending the situation.

"The fight is over, and we are masters of the ship," said he.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

I STAGGERED toward Captain Hilton. He held out his bloody hand to welcome us. He was without a hat, and his face was smeared with blood, and he was breathing violently, apparently greatly exhausted.

Neither of us spoke. Around the fore-hatch were grouped a dozen of our men, armed to the teeth. A dead body swung across a ratline in the lower forerigging. Ropes lay strewn around the deck and upon the sides of the ship in bights; portions of the bulwarks were crimsoned with blood; here and there a body lay quivering in the agonies of death, while the moans and groans of the wounded rent the air. It was a sight to make one's eyes almost.

I was nearly faint at first, but one of our fellows made his

way to the scuttle-butt and procured me water, which never tasted so good before, and never will again. A pain on the top of my head caused me to feel of it after the water had revived me, and I found that I had received a severe scalp wound, and being without a hat, I tied a handkerchief about my temples to keep the blood from trickling into my eyes.

The moment Hilton felt that he could stand, he climbed over the dead bodies and went to the side to see if the schooner had suffered much; for, after his crew, she was the idol of his heart.

Her rigging was a great deal cut up, and her mainsail was full of holes, but her hull appeared all right; and with a sigh of relief, he turned to look after his officers and men, a large number of whom had fallen in the fierce battle that had followed the boarding of the enemy.

Only about a dozen of the enemy had been driven below—the remainder were either dead or wounded with our own men upon the deck.

"Take some men and explore the cabin," said Hilton, addressing me, after the wounded had been attended to, "while I go on board the schooner and see to things there."

Taking three of our men, I picked up my cutlass and ordered them to follow me. We descended the companion-steps and entered the cabin, advancing cautiously, since there was no knowing who was below, or what sort of a reception we might meet with.

We speedily found ourselves in a large and elaborately fitted up cabin or saloon, but it appeared to be wholly deserted. There were some decanters of wine and the remains of a lately enjoyed meal upon the table, and while gazing about the place, I caught sight of myself in a mirror.

Good heavens! Could it be really me?

At that moment three or four faces peered out at as many cabin doors, but they slunk back again on catching sight of us; and no wonder that they did, for they verily must have thought they had fallen into the hands of pirates.

"They are passengers, sir," said one of the men.

"Come out; you are in friendly hands, whoever you are," said I, at which two ladies and three men, one of them advanced in years, came timidly forth.

"What has happened?" asked one of the passengers.

"Well, this ship, whatever her hail may be, is in the hands of the American privateer *Firefiend*," said I.

"Thank God!" they all ejaculated.

"Now tell me what ship this is, for as yet I have not had an opportunity of finding out."

"The ship *George Crocker*, from Boston to the West Indies, lately captured by the British sloop-of-war *Monmouth*, and placed in the charge of a prize crew, to be taken Heaven knows where."

"Indeed; so we have made a recapture, have we? Well, the upshot of it will be that you will be taken back to Boston. How many are there of you?" I said.

"Five."

"Oh, sir, I am so thankful for this!" said a sweet voice just behind me, and turning quickly I found myself in the presence of *Adelaide Crocker*.

For a moment I could scarcely speak, but seeing she did not recognize me—as how should she?—I regained my composure somewhat. Assuring them that they were in no further danger, I finished my inspection and then returned to the deck.

I at once reported to Captain Hilton, telling him among other things of the beautiful girl we had rescued months before in Boston, and flashing a peculiar twinkle upon me, he gave me command of the ship, together with half of the *Firefiend's* crew, with orders to make way back to Boston without loss of time, as the schooner stood badly in need of repairs, as also did the ship.

By this time the decks had been cleared of the ghastly relics of the struggle, and some hands at the pumps were washing down, while others were aloft attending to much-needed work. As soon as I could do so, I cleansed my face and had the surgeon look to my wounds, so that by the time we were ready to make sail, I was feeling all right again.

The dead had all been dropped overboard, and the wounded transferred to the schooner, but this had scarcely been accomplished when the passengers came out of the cabin to have a look around.

I met them at the companion-way, and then *Adelaide Crocker* knew me instantly. That meeting between us was a hearty one, and again and again did she thank me for rescuing her and her father's ship from the clutches of the enemy. And she told me, in her frank, earnest way, as we sat there on the quarter-deck, and watched the waves go by with their white-fringed caps, how she had learned of her

father's sickness at Jamaica, and was going out to nurse him and bring him back to Boston with her; how they had been captured when only one day out, after a smart engagement, in which most of the officers and many of the men had been killed, and that a prize crew, composed of several nationalities, had been placed in charge to take her to some English port, but that they had not been aboard long enough to get repairs made before we had swooped down upon them.

This was the story in a nutshell, confirmed by the other passengers. A beautiful evening was setting in with a smart favoring breeze. The schooner was about a mile ahead of us, leading the way, lame and wounded though she was, and the ship was following with all the canvas I dared to carry.

Second mate Hull was with me, and being a thorough sailor, he afforded me much assistance, and enabled me to attend to the lighter details of getting everything about the ship in order so as to make our sail back to Boston more pleasant and secure.

The next morning I found that the wind had increased somewhat, and that the *Firefiend* had fallen back so as to keep me closer company, and about noon I received a signal from Hilton, and in a short time saw him get into the cutter with a crew and row toward us.

What a rousing cheer was sent up as the noble sailor came up the ladder and sprang upon the deck.

I introduced him to the passengers, after which we spent an hour together going over the ship and ascertaining the amount of damage she had received. In the afternoon he returned to the schooner, after giving me more specific orders, and we continued our peaceful voyage back to Boston, where we had so often gone with our prizes, and where our battle scars had been so often repaired.

My acquaintance, so strangely begun with *Miss Crocker*, now had a chance to ripen into at least a fast friendship, and as I can swear that she had not been out of my mind a whole hour together since the day I had rescued her from the hands of a ruffian who had attempted to kidnap and hold her as a hostage to restrain her farther, it may be easily understood that I lost no opportunity to make myself agreeable to her, and in this I appeared to have little or no trouble.

On arriving at Boston we learned that peace had been declared between England and America, and that our fighting days were over. It was a disappointment to Captain Hilton, and I knew it, but he said little about it. The *Firefiend* was placed on the ways for repairs, during which time he completed negotiations with the United States government regarding the prize money that was due to us, after which he paid the men with his own hands enough to make each one of them rich and independent for life.

Indeed, my own share was something over one hundred thousand dollars, but not the half of what his was, or should have been, and then he reluctantly bade them farewell.

This occupied more than two months, and by this time the beautiful *Firefiend* was again ready for sea—lying at anchor off the Navy Yard, the most admired vessel in the country, if we except the frigate *Constitution*. But I saw only a little of Hilton after this time. He appeared to be anxious to keep out of public view, and a few weeks after everything had been settled, the *Firefiend* was missing from her anchorage one morning, gone no one knew whither. But I learned afterwards that Hilton had shipped another crew of various nationalities, and with it had vanished from view, leaving nothing but the record of his wonderful career behind him.

Various have been the surmises as to what became of him, but as some of them would mar his splendid reputation, I refrain from mentioning them. Suffice it to say that he was never heard of afterwards as the *Ocean Wolf*, although he might have changed both his name and that of the vessel, and he might have taken sides in other wars which were at that time disturbing the tranquility of the world.

This I may say is the most likely solution of the mystery, for his warlike soul would never permit him to settle down as the others of us did to the ways of peace.

Six months passed away, and peace again hovered over our fair land. Business revived and prosperity returned to our gallant people. The guilty were punished and the brave and good rewarded.

My own greatest reward came soon after, for *Adelaide Crocker* became my wife. Wealth and happiness were all mine, and although many years have passed away since then, during which time I have completed this narration for my children, I shall ever look back with a just pride to the days I passed on board the *Firefiend* and under the command of that mysterious man, *THE OCEAN WOLF*.

[THE END.]

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